

Comité consultatif d'experts sur la santé des enfants et l'environnement en Amérique du Nord
Consejo Consultivo de Expertos sobre Salud Infantil y Medio Ambiente en América del Norte
Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America

28 February 2003

ADVICE TO COUNCIL: 03-01

Education and Training of Health and Environmental Professionals on Children's Health and the Environment in North America

The Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America (hereinafter referred to as the 'Expert Advisory Board' or the 'Board') of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

HAVING HELD a successful meeting, on 6 February 2003 in Alexandria, Virginia, USA on the topic of opportunities for promoting education and training of healthcare providers in North America on children's health and the environment,

UNDERSCORING the importance of ensuring that present and future healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses and other health professionals,, receive adequate education and training on the potential effects of environmental factors on children's health and related prevention measures;

STRESSING the importance of a sound scientific basis for education and training efforts in this area, the vital role of ongoing and new research into health-environment linkages, and the need to develop a cadre of scientists with expertise in children's health and the environment;

RECOGNIZING the need to place a greater emphasis on the prevention of negative environmental impacts on child health through the active engagement of environmental scientists, other environmental professionals and the public health sector;

NOTING with concern that issues of environmental health, including children's health, are inadequately addressed through existing undergraduate and graduate educational programs for health and environmental professionals in the three North American countries,

NOTING that by benefiting from education and training on the influences of environmental factors on health, healthcare professionals will be better equipped to play their important roles in society as promoters and protectors of health, as educators of parents, families and the general public, as researchers and as advocates.

RECOGNIZING the ongoing activities of other groups and institutions in this area, including the International Joint Commission (IJC) Health Professionals Task Force, the network of Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the various national and local organizations and institutions who are engaged on this issue,

HEREBY:

COMMITTS to assisting the Secretariat in preparing a document that provides a synthesis of information on existing challenges, gaps, opportunities and key players in this area, and outlines a proposed framework for North American action;

Within such a framework, the Board sees the need to pursue short-term and longer-term actions.

In the short term, the Board REQUESTS the Council to consider providing resources over the next 1-2 years for the following targeted initiatives:

- Support the participation of Mexican professionals in the chief pediatric residents training program to be held in Seattle in May 2003, and in the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation training for healthcare practitioners on pesticides exposure to be held in Washington, DC in June 2003;
- Undertake an evaluation of the pediatric environmental health specialty units (PEHSUs) to assess their effectiveness in advancing health provider education on children's health and the environment, and with a view to assessing the value of replicating the PEHSU model in additional centers in Canada and Mexico;
- Provide funding for new scientists from Canada and the United States to participate in ongoing research projects in Mexico as a means of building capacities and international exchange;
- Build on the existing National Research Scholar Award (NRSA) training fellowships for children's environmental health in the United States by opening them to scientists-in-training from Canada and Mexico.

Recognizing the value of the recently established pediatric environmental health fellowship program in the United States, the Board URGES the Council to promote an expansion of such fellowships into all three countries.

The Board RECOMMENDS that the Council direct the Secretariat to facilitate the sharing of educational/training materials, experiences and expertise among the three countries, e.g. through relevant events, networks and via the CEC website.

With a view to building capacities for the longer term, including capacities for research on environmental exposures and potential risks to children, the Board COMMITTS to organizing a meeting with the objective of developing and empowering children's environmental health champions/scholars who, within their own communities, will take on the task of promoting healthcare professional education and training. The meeting also will be an opportunity to discuss the above-mentioned framework for North American action, and to focus attention on existing gaps and opportunities for improvement. In preparation for this meeting, the Board, with the support of the Secretariat, will reach out to key institutions and organizations with a view to identifying individuals who would serve as effective champions. Over the longer term, it is anticipated that these champions would play a key role in influencing the incorporation of children's environmental health issues into the education of medical and nursing students, other health practitioners involved with children, as well as environmental researchers.

The Board underscores the importance of measures to assess the outcomes of each of the above-mentioned actions, and stands ready to assist in this regard.