



## Position Statement (April 2016): Environmental Public Health

**OPHA Mission Statement: To be an inclusive voice for Public Health and to ensure the optimal health of all Ohioans.**

Environmental Public Health focuses on the interrelationship between people and their environment, including protecting against environmental threats and factors that may adversely affect human health.<sup>1</sup> The environment includes all of the physical, chemical, social, and biological factors external to a person. The environment affects people at every point in their life- including where they live, work, play, shop, eat, worship, and age. An unhealthy environment can be linked to both chronic and acute conditions, health disparities, and poor quality of life. Improving and sustaining environmental quality and promoting health and well-being are important activities for Environmental Public Health and are consistent with the mission of Public Health to carry out society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy.<sup>2</sup>

### **Impact**

Individuals and communities can impact environmental quality. Accordingly, a single policy or regulation is not sufficient to ensure an environment exists in which people can be healthy. The environment affects a person's potential for exposures to hazardous substances or unacceptable conditions. In turn, these exposures may increase the risk for developing many communicable and non-communicable diseases. In addition, the environment can influence other issues such as risk of injuries, violence, alcohol and drug addiction, and mental health. The surrounding environment also can affect many health behaviors, including physical activity, diet, and access to healthcare. At broader levels, the environment is affected by issues such as climate change and energy practices.

### **Role of OPHA**

Ensuring a high level of sustainable environmental quality depends on policies and practices that promote health, protect against adverse environmental hazards, and prevent any actual or potential hazards from impacting human health. Only through a culture that embraces a combination of applicable policies and practices can this be achieved. The American Public

Health Association advocates for the application of the Precautionary Principle, which calls for precaution when conclusive evidence is lacking but credible scientific studies indicate potential for adverse health effects.<sup>3</sup> Public Health advocates for policies that promote health by considering the impact of all policies through a Health and Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) perspective. Therefore, OPHA supports and advocates for policy-making that systematically takes into account the health and equity implications of those policies, by working collaboratively across all sectors to achieve common health goals.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPH Tracking) are two tools that can support an HEiAP approach to policy-making. EPH Tracking is the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data from environmental hazard monitoring and from human exposure and health effects surveillance. The goal of EPH Tracking is to protect communities by providing information to federal, state, and local agencies for planning, applying, and evaluating public health interventions to prevent and control environmentally related diseases.<sup>4</sup> HIA provides information and recommendations that support informed policy-making in areas that affect Environmental Public Health including land use and development, transportation, siting housing and schools, businesses, and social activities.<sup>5</sup> For example, when considering a proposed policy for land development, policy-makers can review results and recommendations of a HIA to consider potential health effects of the development. HEiAP, HIA, and EPH Tracking are complementary and together comprise a comprehensive, integrated framework for recognizing and monitoring environmental health indicators, developing and implementing Public Health strategies for protecting and promoting a healthy environment and promoting policies that will be promulgated to sustain these strategies and assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.

### **Recommendations**

1. Support adoption of public policies and programs that contribute to attaining Healthy People 2020 Environmental Public Health objectives.
2. Advocate for including the Health and Equity in All Policies framework in formulating environmental Public Health policies by public and private entities at the local, regional, and state levels.
3. Promote the requirement of including and considering recommendations of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as an adjunct to HEiAP when considering policy options.
4. Support the adoption of Environmental Public Health Tracking as a means to integrate environmental monitoring and surveillance and to collect primary data that can be used to inform program development, community health planning, and policy promulgation to preventive environmentally related diseases.

5. Promote and publicize best practices to inform and educate the public about Environmental Public Health.
6. Promote and support environmental Public Health programs at the local, state, and national levels.
7. Support and advocate for workforce development training and education in environmental public health.
8. Enhance and expand integration, cooperation and coordination and services among applicable state and local agencies that have a role in assuring a healthy environment.
9. Advocate for incorporating the Precautionary Principle in the policy process when there is credible evidence for potential harm to human health.

## **References**

<sup>1</sup>American Public Health Association. (1988). *What is environmental public health?* Retrieved from <http://www.ephs-apha.org/newsite/what.html>

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Medicine. (1988). *The future of public health*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>3</sup>American Public Health Association. (2010, November). *A precautionary approach to reducing American exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals. Policy Number 20104*. Retrieved from <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1397>

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) *National environmental public health tracking*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/background.htm>

<sup>5</sup>Hribar, C. (2012). Public health assessments, environmental public health, and the role of boards of health. *NALBOH NEWSBRIEF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2, 7.