

## Feature Articles

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### NIEHS Launches New Collaboration with the World Health Organization

*By: Paula Whitacre*



On February 20, 2014, NIEHS and the World Health Organization (WHO) will begin a new chapter in their decades-long partnership. The day will mark the official launch of the NIEHS-WHO Collaborating Center for Environmental Health Science. The launch will take place in conjunction with the winter meeting of the National Advisory Environmental Health Sciences Council.

“By joining forces, NIEHS and WHO will help to ensure that cutting edge environmental health science will be translated into effective public health interventions to improve health around the world,” said NIEHS Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D.

#### **Building Bridges**

As a WHO Collaborating Center, NIEHS joins a [network](#) of academic and scientific institutions around the world designed to facilitate information exchange and technical cooperation.

“Even as the global health community shifts its focus from infectious to non-communicable diseases, the critical role of environmental exposures in adding to the global chronic disease burden is not well appreciated. The Collaborating Center provides a new and unique platform for NIEHS to address this gap in awareness,” said John Balbus, M.D., NIEHS senior advisor for global health, who will head the new center.

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### **NIEHS Focus**

The focus of the Collaborating Center at NIEHS reflects five priority areas of research and research translation: children's environmental health, climate change and human health, developmental origins of health and disease, e-waste, and indoor air pollution. “Increased dialogue and understanding is a benefit to being a Collaborating Center,” said Claudia Thompson, Ph.D., a member of the NIEHS Global Environmental Health Program Steering Committee. “The designation also will increase integration across common themes within the Institute.”

For example, NIEHS seeks to better understand the link between indoor air pollution and premature deaths, such as through support of intervention studies to investigate realistic alternatives to biomass-burning cookstoves in developing countries. “Having the weight of being a Collaborating Center, we can see who else has activities in this area around the globe, which should help in coordination and more quickly getting data,” Thompson said. “That will help increase dialogue and accelerate findings.”

### **The Collaboration**

The Collaborating Center designation culminates three productive decades of partnership, beginning with a cooperative agreement in the early 1980s facilitated by William Suk, Ph.D., director of the NIEHS Center for Risk & Integrated Sciences and the Superfund Research Fund.

As detailed in a [2011 WHO publication](#) , cooperation between the two agencies helped further the International Programme on Chemical Safety and the Environmental Criteria series, an influential series of more than 200, peer-reviewed publications that provide information on a range of environmental health topics to governments.

As a Collaborating Center, the two organizations will continue to work together on developing training programs, and supporting and hosting conferences and workshops related to the five focus areas of the Center. Some past activities include:

A side event - Health Adaptation in the US and Around the World - at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties in Poland in November 2013.

[A working meeting](#) on e-waste and child health at WHO headquarters in Geneva in June 2013 that led to [The Geneva Declaration on E-Waste and Children's Health, 2013](#) .

A side event at the third International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM3) in Nairobi, Kenya, on September 16, 2012 as part of joint activities on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals.

A side event to the Prenatal Programming and Toxicology III Workshop in Paris, France, in July 2012 to explore ways to incorporate prenatal and early life preventive measures to reduce environmental contributions to NCDs.