

But the slide illustrates that communications allows us to understand our partner's language. We need to know what their story is. We understand how the partners give and receive information. We have to learn about and value our partner's current skills, we have to build trust, we have to develop and then sustain partnerships and that way we will have greater public health impacts.

So our strategies for fostering bidirectional communication of our numerous groups, and two groups that I want to talk about, especially first is the public health or the public interest partnerships, and this is a formal group that we support of community and advocacy representatives. They include groups such as the Alliance for Healthy Homes, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Cure Autism Now, the American Public Health Association, and lots of other groups.

Working with the partners allows the NIEHS to learn about the priorities of these organizations and help us to shape our research agenda. In turn, of course, they learn about us and what it is that we're doing and about the other partner organizations. So they are a powerful voice for environmental health issues.

I also want to mention the friends of NIEHS, and these are groups such as many professional organizations that are able to actually go and advocate for us on the Hill, which is obviously an important thing or support that we need.

So, another issue that we have are community forums. Now, some of you may realize that we used to call these something else up until last summer. These were town hall meetings. Town hall meetings sometimes have a different connotation today. In general these meetings maintain a certain level of decorum and civility. We hold these meetings across the country are we are able to hear real issues. In the 15 months that I have been onboard we have held four meetings in four very different areas and communities.

The first meeting was held on the campus of Rutgers University, and one of the major issues of interest to that community was the chromium contamination, which is very large in parts of, for example, Jersey City and other parts of related areas. The second one that I held was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, completely different interests. Milwaukee is part of the rust belt, and you have many decaying housing issues or old housing issues, and the major issue was lead in housing at that public forum. The third one that I held was in Sausalito, California. Obviously a very different community, an upper income community as well, although we did have many representatives from across the Bay. And one of the major concerns there was the breast cancer issue. I think many of you know that Marin County, which is where Sausalito is, has historically, or for a long time had a higher incidence of breast cancer than many other parts of the country. Whether that was actually related to the fact that you had many upper middle class and wealthy women who were taking hormone replacement therapy, is a question to be resolved, but we know that the incidence of cancer, of breast cancer has actually dropped since then, at least the widespread use of hormone replacement therapy, after the report in 2002.

And then the fourth one, which I just held, was it last week or the week before, I lose track of time, whatever, it was very recently, was in New York City in West Harlem, and I guess kind of to our surprise it was a very active group and a very active meeting, and the major concern was bed bugs. I think a lot of us used to think that bed bugs were a problem staying at a fleabag hotel. That's not the issue anymore. Because of, I would say, overuse of pesticides, most of the bed bugs have developed resistance to the pesticides that were commonly in use, and especially in your disadvantaged communities, landlords will come in if they have an active enough group, or an active enough, say, renter, and they'll clean up their apartment, but you can't clean up one apartment in a large apartment building, because the bed bugs just go the neighbors until, you know, the cleaners go away and then the bed bugs come back.

This is very interesting how in different parts of the country public health concerns can be very different, but we need to listen to them and adjust our programs and our research to be able to deal with them.