

APHA meeting inspires attendees with calls for a healthy nation

By Robin Mackar

Acting U.S. Surgeon General Boris Lushniak, M.D., helped kick off and set the tone for the American Public Health Association (APHA) 142nd annual meeting Nov. 15-19 in New Orleans.

With energy in his voice and a commanding yet approachable presence, [Lushniak](http://www.hhs.gov/about/foa/osleadership/surgeon-general-bio.html) (<http://www.hhs.gov/about/foa/osleadership/surgeon-general-bio.html>) reminded attendees of the progress that has been made in public health, and the journey still ahead.

“You are the heart of public health,” Lushniak told the thousands who gathered Nov. 16 to hear him, and other public health leaders, speak. “The responsibility to ensure that we have a healthy nation, free of tobacco and health disparities, falls on all our shoulders.” This inspirational call to action permeated the sessions that followed.

NIEHS presence at APHA

NIEHS staff and grantees were prominent among the more than 12,500 public health professionals who attended this year’s conference. Representatives from across the institute presented new findings and initiatives, and led many sessions and discussions.

Christine Ekenga, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow in the NIEHS Epidemiology Branch, presented two sessions related to the Sister Study, a long-term project looking at environmental and genetic components related to breast cancer. Ekenga focused on new findings related to occupational exposure to solvents.

Attendees representing the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training worked throughout the week to lead numerous sessions, present posters, and moderate round-table discussions highlighting NIEHS efforts, with a special emphasis on Worker Education and Training Program activities and the Partnerships for Environmental Public Health program.

National Toxicology Program (NTP) representative Alex Merrick, Ph.D., participated in a panel led by Kenneth Olden, Ph. D., former NIEHS and NTP director, who is now at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Merrick’s session focused on mouse epigenome and gene expression studies that could lead to a better understanding of nutritional status and disease susceptibility in human populations.

Staff from the NIEHS Office of the Director led important sessions about climate change, including a well-attended town hall meeting, where members of the U.S. Global Change Research Program Interagency Crosscutting Group on Climate Change and Human Health presented information and updates on federal activities, including the Third National Climate Assessment, President’s Climate Action Plan, and other initiatives.

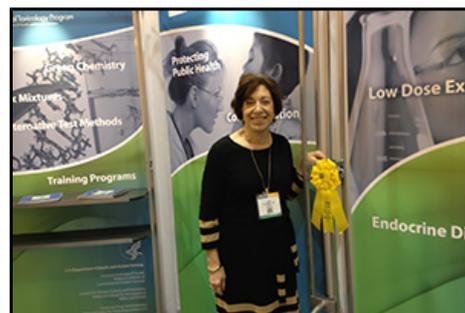
Disaster research response

Nicole Lurie, M.D., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services assistant secretary for preparedness and response, joined with Sam Groseclose, D.V.M., of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; NIEHS Senior Medical Advisor Aubrey Miller, M.D.; and Joseph (Chip) Hughes, director of the NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program, to talk about a new disaster research response effort to help agencies and communities become better prepared to perform timely health research.

The NIH [Disaster Research Response Project](#), outlined by the NIEHS presenters, includes ready-to-go research data collection tools, research protocols, and a network of trained responders. This year, the NIH Disaster Research Response Project team will be focusing on additional training exercises with various federal, state, academic, and community stakeholders, as well as initiating new efforts to facilitate timely gathering of the environmental and toxicology data needed to compliment the health



A poster session at APHA, organized by the Environment section on environmental justice, highlighted efforts by grantees to engage communities to work with their academic partners to better understand vulnerable populations. Pictured, from left, are Amy Schulz, Ph.D.; Yolanda Hill-Ashford; Myra Tetteh; and Donele Wilkins, NIEHS awardees with the Detroit Reproductive Environmental Advocacy Matters Team and the University of Michigan School of Public Health. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Beard)



Birnbaum made it a point to stop by the NIEHS exhibit after her presentation on research efforts on the Gulf Coast. Birnbaum congratulated OCPL staff on receiving a third place ribbon for overall appearance of the NIEHS exhibit. (Photo courtesy of Robin Mackar)

information collected during a disaster response.

Miller and Hughes discussed some of the lessons learned from such recent disasters as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and how these responses have led to national recommendations and plans to improve disaster research response.

NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., also discussed NIH disaster research response efforts during her talk, highlighting the NIEHS transdisciplinary research portfolio that is advancing community resilience, and strengthening the public health infrastructure and capacity in Gulf Coast states impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. She encouraged attendees to use the NIH-supported studies as a platform for future environmental health research, explorations of community and individual resiliency, and advancing understanding of the toxicology of pollutants associated with oil spills, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

(Robin Mackar is news director in the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison, and a frequent contributor to the Environmental Factor.)



Epidemiologist postdoctoral fellow Ekenga stopped by the NIEHS booth, after giving two presentations on findings from the Sister Study. (Photo courtesy of Robin Mackar)



Merrick enjoyed presenting on a panel organized by Olden. (Photo courtesy of Robin Mackar)



The acting U.S. surgeon general, left, made the rounds at APHA. He spent some time at the NIEHS exhibit and talked with NIEHS staff, including Miller. (Photo courtesy of Robin Mackar)



Liam O'Fallon, NIEHS Partnerships for Environmental Public Health program coordinator, also had an opportunity to talk with Lushniak about environmental health literacy. (Photo courtesy of Aubrey Miller)

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