

Amalia Laborde, University of the Republic (Uruguay)

[music] Anne Johnson: This is Global Environmental Health Chat, the podcast that explores environmental health issues that transcend national boundaries. I'm your host Anne Johnson, and this podcast is produced by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Welcome to part two of our podcast series on the World Health Organization's Children's Environmental Health Collaborating Centres Network. Our guest is Dr. Amalia Laborde. She's professor in the Toxicology Department of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the Republic in Uruguay. I asked her why she felt a global network is needed to address children's environmental health issues.

Amalia Laborde: In many other fields it's necessary nowadays to be in close collaboration with other centers, but specifically in these global problems—like air contamination, lead exposure, mercury exposure, climate change, e-waste related problems—are really complex, and we need to work together.

Anne Johnson: Amalia's institution has been a WHO collaborating center since 2010. She says having access to other researchers through the network has provided important leverage to establish her institution's Pediatric Environmental Unit and convince local stakeholders to invest in curbing environmental exposures in children.

Amalia Laborde: During this time I think that we were strengthened thanks to the information and the investigations that many collaborating centers are doing in the area. We really received support from other centers to give evidence, based in their research, to convince our authorities and our health system to incorporate this view of environmental health, particularly for children. And that was really important.

Anne Johnson: She said the collaborating centers in the network all bring something valuable and unique to the table. Some focus on basic research. Others focus more on research translation and public health. Working together, each center can take advantage of what the others have to offer.

Amalia Laborde: Our collaborating center is more related to education and actions with the health sector than research. Environmental issues are not always well addressed and sometimes are interpreted or disseminated with confusion or creating alarm in the population, and so we are trying to work with information that is based in scientific research. For us, it's been really important to be involved and at the same time supported by a network of scientific research.

Anne Johnson: The environmental health issues children face in Uruguay are also found in many countries around the world. Lead exposure is a big one. Many Uruguayan children have been exposed to lead through gasoline, despite a ban on leaded gas since 2004, or through contamination left over from past industrial activity. The burning of electronic waste is also a contributor. Other challenges include poor indoor air quality and high levels of exposure to pesticides from agricultural and household use.

Looking forward, Amalia says there's still a lot of work to be done to surmount these issues. But being part of the WHO network provides a valuable platform that can help reduce childhood exposures in her country, as well as around the world.

Amalia Laborde: Future directions of the Pediatric Environmental Unit—it's to go in deep with the interventions. Territorial, familial, individual interventions in order to stop exposure, to create a better environment for the children. But at the same time, we part of the academia, and we are interested in improve and increase our research capacities, and I think working with the network will make it possible to generate new knowledge from the real problems in this region.

Anne Johnson: Generating that new knowledge—and sharing it regionally and globally—depends on strong collaboration. Visit our website for more information about the WHO Children's Environmental Health Collaborating Centres Network. You can find us online at niehs.nih.gov/geh.

Thanks again to our guests for this podcast series, Dr. Bill Suk of NIEHS, and Dr. Amalia Laborde of the University of the Republic in Uruguay. You've been listening to Global Environmental Health Chat, brought to you by the Global Environmental Health program of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. [music]