

Feature Article

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A Look Back at the First Year of the NIEHS–WHO Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Sciences

By: John Balbus

February 2015 marks the first year anniversary of the official launch of the NIEHS–WHO Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Sciences. This anniversary offers an opportunity to look back on the Collaborating Centre's first year and the substantial progress it has made in fostering rigorous science and raising awareness of global environmental health issues in key venues around the world.

The NIEHS Collaborating Centre has six topical focus areas: children's environmental health, climate change, cookstoves and household air pollution, developmental origins of health and disease (DOHaD), electronic waste (e-waste), and chemical risk assessment. The Centre's goal of building capacity for environmental health in low- and middle-income countries cuts across all of these topical areas.

Since the launch event, the NIEHS Collaborating Centre has organized a network of fellow collaborating centers that share a special interest in children's environmental health. Under the leadership of NIEHS, members met in person and by phone to organize an information-sharing network. Future plans include incorporating additional international organizations working on children's environmental health and other NIEHS-funded Children's Environmental Health Centers. NIEHS supported a meeting on children's environmental health in Uruguay that is summarized in a recent [Environmental Health Perspectives article](#). The highlight of the past year for the climate change focus area was the very first [global summit on climate change and human health](#) hosted by WHO. NIEHS helped plan the meeting and was represented among the panel speakers and participants. This coming year will feature the posting of an online climate change and health literature database, support for a training workshop on climate change and health in Delhi, India, publication of a portfolio analysis of global climate change and health literature, and support for a conference on climate change and health among the WHO Collaborating Centres in the Americas. NIEHS activities on cookstoves and household air pollution include substantial extramural grant funding, toxicological analyses of cookstove emissions, and international collaboration through the Trans-NIH Cookstove Workgroup. Within the Collaborating Centre, planning is underway for a June workshop in Honduras that will assist the countries of the Americas in implementing recent WHO guidelines on indoor air quality.

NIEHS and WHO share a strong interest in raising awareness of the importance of early-life exposures in later-life diseases and the translation of that knowledge into effective public health interventions. In October, the NIEHS Collaborating Centre provided support for the Prenatal Prevention and Toxicology meeting (PPTOXIV) that featured sessions on translating science and on developing a global network

focused on the importance of environmental exposures and DOHaD. The Collaborating Centre also convened DOHaD experts from around the world after the PPTOX meeting to explore international collaboration. A series of articles calling for an integrated approach to disease prevention that begins prenatally and in early life – including a focus on exposure to environmental chemicals, psychological stressors, and nutritional factors – has begun to appear in [published literature](#), with more slated to appear this year.

The Collaborating Centre's work on e-waste has focused on raising awareness within the public health and health policy communities about the importance of e-waste exposures for children. Highlights of the past year include completion of a report from an NIEHS-supported meeting held in September 2013. NIEHS will support another conference on engineering interventions for e-waste exposures at the upcoming meeting of the [Pacific Basin Consortium for Environment and Health](#) in Depok, Indonesia, and publication of a report titled "E-waste and Harm to Children's Health: A Growing Global Problem" from the 2013 meeting.

In October, the first meeting of the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network was certainly a highlight of the year for NIEHS-supported network activities. The network seeks to build capacity for high-quality risk assessment around the world through partnership and information sharing. NIEHS is contributing by developing a newsletter and communication strategy.

Partnering and building capacity with environmental health colleagues around the world is critical to achieving the NIEHS vision of global leadership in reducing the burden of environmental diseases. The NIEHS–WHO Collaborating Centre has made great progress in establishing partnerships and setting the stage for strong global collaboration on a variety of issues. I'm excited for the work we've laid out for the Centre this year and look forward to reporting back next year about our further progress.