



**NEW BRUNSWICK COLLABORATIVE EFFORT FOR  
CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

**Healthy Children for the Next Generation:  
Protecting the health of children from  
environmental hazards**

**FOR: GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES & POLICY MAKERS**

**AUTHORED BY: TEAM POLICY, NBCECEH  
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## BACKGROUND / STATUS

There is an emerging field of 'children's environmental health'<sup>1</sup> that recognizes that:

- the health of children depends on the environments in which they live, grow, play and learn
- the health of an increasing number of children is threatened by the consequences of deteriorating natural and built environments, compounded by poverty and service inequities
- children are entitled to grow and live in healthy environments (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 1989)
- two of the fundamental 'determinants of health' are *early child development and physical environments*<sup>2</sup>

Children's environmental health is being addressed at the international, national and provincial levels:

### **International progress**

- WHO: The *Global Plan of Action for Children's Health and the Environment: 2010-2015*<sup>3</sup> will be regularly monitored and reported upon by the World Health Organization.
- EUROPE: *The Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe*<sup>4</sup> was published in 2004.
- UK: *A Children's Environment and Health Strategy for the UK*<sup>5</sup> was published in 2009.

### **Canadian progress**

- The Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment undertook an eight-year process of research, consultation and action. The result was *First Steps in Lifelong Health: A Vision and Strategy for Children's Health and Environment in Canada* (2008)<sup>6</sup>.

### **New Brunswick progress**

The *New Brunswick* response began in 2005, when the New Brunswick Collaborative Effort for Children's Environmental Health began working collaboratively to reduce children's exposures to environmental contaminants. In 2010, the Province of New Brunswick introduced Canada's first Environmental Health (Public Health) Unit.

### **Collaborative Effort for Children's Environmental Health:**

There are four areas of focus:

- 1) Education for families and professionals
- 2) Research
- 3) Policy and legislation
- 4) Consumer products

'Team Policy', one of the Action Teams of the New Brunswick Collaborative, has been working toward these objectives (among others):

- The development of legislation (for example, a Bill of Rights) to uphold the rights of children to a healthy environment;
- Finding a mechanism to apply a 'children's environmental health lens' to relevant provincial legislation, policies and programs;
- Specific provincial legislative, regulatory or policy initiatives to reduce children's exposure to contaminants.



## TALKING POINTS

**Bill of Rights<sup>7,8</sup>** The primary policy goal of the proposed legislation (e.g., Bill of Rights) is to work toward an equitable and sustainable society in which all New Brunswick children breathe clean air, both indoors and out, consume safe food and drinking water, and are protected from the risks posed by environmental contaminants, such as those found in many consumer products.

**A 'children's environmental health lens'.** The primary goal of this initiative is to entrench Children's Environmental Health as a central organizing principle for healthy public policy. A mechanism will be sought to engage policy makers on the Children's Environmental Health issue. This could occur either through an existing interdepartmental committee (e.g., the Interdepartmental Deputy Ministers' Committee on Wellness) or through a new mechanism (e.g., a secretariat for children's environmental health). The mission would be to apply a 'children's environmental health lens' to all relevant legislative, regulatory or policy initiatives, and recommend appropriate action.

**Initiatives to reduce children's exposure to contaminants.** The mechanism determined above could also promote precautionary policies and programs to prevent and reduce harmful environmental exposures during fetal and childhood development. This work would involve taking action on the following:

- Making a population health impact assessment a necessary requirement prior to certain types of development;
- Determining the levels of environmental contaminants that have accumulated in New Brunswick children;
- Quantifying the burden to the health care system of child health conditions associated with environmental risk factors;
- Developing specific legislation, regulations and policies that will reduce children's exposures to environmental agents.

## CALL TO ACTION

Given that:

- the physical environment is a determinant of health<sup>9</sup>
- environmental exposures are largely preventable<sup>10</sup>
- children are more vulnerable than adults to harm from environmental exposures<sup>11</sup>
- there are significant health impacts from prenatal or childhood environmental exposures, including reproductive tract defects, reduced sperm counts, asthma, impacts on brain functioning, behaviour, and the development of later life cancers<sup>12</sup>
- exposures can occur from many sources, both indoors and outdoors, including air, water, soil, food and consumer products<sup>13</sup>
- many chemicals are not regulated and most have been inadequately evaluated<sup>14</sup>; and
- scientific knowledge of the health effects of many chemicals, particularly the potential effect on child development, remains insufficient<sup>15</sup>

Therefore,

***we call on government agencies and policy makers at all levels to understand and address links between health and the environment and to integrate this understanding in policy, legislative and budgetary decisions and actions.***

In particular, government departments and agencies are encouraged to consider these actions:

- Apply a 'children's environmental health lens' to all relevant legislative, regulatory or policy initiatives.
- Support the enactment of the NB Environmental Bill of Rights.
- Develop a multi-sectoral action plan to reduce children's exposure to harmful chemicals.
- Continue to contribute to the work of the New Brunswick Collaborative Effort for Children's Environmental Health.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization. 2007. Definition of environmental health: those aspects of human health, including quality of life, that are determined by physical, chemical, biological, social, and psychosocial factors in the environment. It also refers to the theory and practice of assessing, correcting, controlling, and preventing those factors in the environment that can potentially affect adversely the health of present and future generations. Accessed July 6, 2010 at: [http://www.who.int/topics/environmental\\_health/en](http://www.who.int/topics/environmental_health/en)

<sup>2</sup>Mikkonen, J. and Raphael, D. 2010. *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management. Accessed May 28, 2010 at: <http://www.thecanadianfacts.org>.

<sup>3</sup>World Health Organization. 2010. *Global Plan of Action for Children's Health and the Environment (2010 - 2015)* Accessed July 6, 2010 at: <http://www.who.int/ceh/en/>

<sup>4</sup>Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. *The Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe*. Accessed July 6, 2010 at: <http://www.thepep.org/ClearingHouse/docfiles/CEPAHE.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>UK Health Protection Agency. 2009. *A Children's Environment and Health Strategy for the K*. Accessed July 6, 2010 at: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/cehape>

<sup>6</sup>Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment. 2008. *First Steps in Lifelong Health: A Vision and Strategy for Children's Health and Environment in Canada*. Accessed July 6, 2010 at: <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/collections/vision-and-strategy-childrens-health-and-environment-canada>

<sup>7</sup>D. Spady, C. Soskolne, N. Ries, I. Buka, L. Nemer, A. Orsonio-Vargas, R. Bertollini, B. Ladd, *Governance Instruments and Child Health: Informing Canadian Policy. Final Report to Health Canada's Health Policy Research Program* [2006] Contribution Agreement #6795-15-2004/6450002.

<sup>8</sup>Spady, D., Ries, N., Ladd, B., Buka, I., Osornio-Vargas, A., Soskolne, C. 2008. Governance Instruments that Protect Children's Environmental Health: Is Enough Being Done? *Environmental Law Review*. Vol.10, No. 3. 200-217.

<sup>9</sup>Public Health Agency of Canada. 2006. Determinants of Health. (accessed Jan 28, 2009 at [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/media/nrrp/2006/2006\\_06bk2-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/media/nrrp/2006/2006_06bk2-eng.php))

<sup>10</sup>World Health Organization. 2010. *Global Plan of Action for Children's Health and the Environment (2010 - 2015)*, 13. Accessed July 6, 2010 at: <http://www.who.int/ceh/en/>

<sup>11</sup>Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment. 2005. *Child Health and the Environment – A Primer*, pp 19-23.

<sup>12</sup>ibid.

<sup>13</sup>ibid.

<sup>14</sup>ibid, 11.

<sup>15</sup>Wigle, D.T. 2003. *Child Health and the Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 375.

## Signatories :

Bonnie Hamilton Bogart, Consultant in Public Health, Environmental Health and Social Development and Co-chair, Policy Team

Sharon Murphy Flatt, Conservation Council of New Brunswick and Co-chair, Policy Team

Cathy O'Brian-Larivee, Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, UNB Saint John

Gordon Dalzell, Saint John Citizens's Coalition for Clean Air

Barbara MacKinnon, New Brunswick Lung Association

Grace Getty, Faculty of Nursing UNB Fredericton

Paula Wood, Fredericton Family Resource Center

## Contact Information:

[www.nben.ca/en](http://www.nben.ca/en) (Go to Groups in Action)

[www.nben.ca/fr](http://www.nben.ca/fr)