

Workshop on The Viability of Advancing a National Environmental Health Agenda in Canada



National Collaborating Centre
for Environmental Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
en santé environnementale

in collaboration with the
Canadian Public Health Association



June 1, 2008
CPHA 2008 Annual Conference
Halifax, NS

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Production of this report has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada through the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Agency or the Centre.

1. Introduction

At the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) 2007 annual conference held last September, the David Suzuki Foundation officially launched the Prescription for a Healthy Canada: Towards a National Environmental Health Strategy. This document champions the idea of building an overall environment and health framework that would feature coordinated, effective, and timely strategic development involving multiple partners.

The National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (NCCEH) and CPHA are interested in fostering further discussion about this concept and wish to hear from interested participants about the underlying issues and key priorities. To launch the dialogue a Workshop on the Viability of Advancing a National Environmental Health Agenda in Canada was held on June 1 at the CPHA 2008 Annual Conference in Halifax. The session was hosted by NCCEH in collaboration with CPHA. There were 18 attendees. The session was organized:

- *To foster discussion about advancing a national environmental health agenda;*
- *To hear from interested participants about the underlying issues, current needs, expectations, and priorities;*
- *To identify key partners and possible processes for potentially moving this forward.*

The workshop opened with welcoming comments from Christina Chociolko, NCCEH's Network Coordinator, who provided background to and context for the session, and Judy Guernsey of Dalhousie University, who reiterated the importance of NCCEH's work and the need to identify some steps to advance the national environmental health agenda. The facilitator was Frank Schwartz, who is also author of this report.

The remainder of this report sets out the results achieved at the workshop. In addition, there are five appendices. Appendix 1 contains the workshop agenda. Appendix 2 consists of a list of attendees. Appendix 3 contains speaker profiles. Appendix 4 contains the group-produced critical success factor lists. Appendix 5 provides a summary of the results of the Session Assessment Form completed by participants.

2. Workshop Results

The workshop produced three key results:

1. **A better understanding of the national context** – The combination of panel presentations helped to crystallize a perspective that, while we are in the early stages of building an agenda, there is much that has to be done and the barriers are formidable; however, the Canadian population is becoming ever more concerned and there are excellent examples of success in other countries. (Section 3)
2. **A list of the five most critical factors in moving forward to develop a national environmental health agenda** – As a result of the attendees participation, five major critical success factors were identified (Section 4):
 1. *Motivating for Action*
 2. *Getting to the policy- and decision-makers*
 3. *Generating evidence and knowledge*
 4. *Creating and participating in agenda setting event(s)*
 5. *Starting to build a National Environmental Health Strategic Plan*
3. **An appreciation that dealing with four of the five factors can be done with and through current organizations** – The first four of these factors can be addressed within the current institutional framework. Coalitions can be built, policy-makers approached, research conducted, and publicized events created or fostered. The last item will take more concerted effort, and an organization will have to take the lead. (Section 4)

3. The National Perspective

The national perspective was presented by three panelists:

- Onalee Randell, Director, Health and Environment, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK);
- David Boyd, Trudeau Scholar, Simon Fraser University professor, and author of the Suzuki report; and
- Ray Copes, Scientific Director of the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health.

(Profiles of the speakers appear in Appendix 3. Their slide presentations are available on the NCCEH website: www.ncceh.ca.)

Onalee Randell's presentation, *Inuit Environment and Health: One Issue under Climate Change*, set out clearly how changes in the environment have had direct and readily observable social, economic, and physical and mental health impacts on Canada's northern populations. In addition, her observation was that the greater the rate and magnitude of change, the more difficult it is and will be to adapt. A compelling "story" was of the children who had to be taught not to handle bumble bees since, never having experience of them, children were picking them up and getting stung.

David Boyd's presentation, *Prescription for a Healthy Canada: Towards a National Environmental Health Strategy*, indicated that there was a strong and compelling case for an environmental health strategy in Canada. He spoke of the high environmental burden of disease in Canada, the progress other countries have made in this area, and Canada's laggardness. On the other hand, research has shown that Canadians consider environmental pollution among the top health concerns in Canada. He suggested that one way to advance the agenda is to "ignite" the discussion of environmental health in the community.

Ray Copes' presentation, *Environmental Sustainability and Impacts on Health: Building an Agenda*, pointed out the key gaps in what we need to know. While we have a lot to learn, we do have sufficient information to move forward, but doing so will require more researchers and more practice-ready graduates. He argued for the need to get good environmental health advocates in policy-making positions.

The facilitator summarized the "perspective" as consisting of the following eight key points:

- Clear evidence is emerging of the impacts of environmental changes
- We are moved by "compelling stories" as much as by data and information
- Other countries are far advanced in successfully creating and implementing environmental health agendas and have learned that becoming more "green" is actually economically beneficial
- Canada has a "long way to go"
- Discussion on environmental health issues and paths have to be "ignited"
- The agenda will not be moved without advocates in policy-making positions
- All of this needs the support of knowledge and evidence development and of competent practitioners

4. Critical Success Factors

Having heard the presentations, participants were divided into three groups, and were asked to address the following question:

What are the two or three most critical factors in building a dynamic environmental health framework for Canada?

The three groups reported back (see Appendix 4) and the following list of five factors were considered most critical:

<p>1. <i>Motivating for Action</i></p>	<p>Motivating for Action (igniting the discussion) – is considered critical to engage Canadians and to have our society demand action. A key step in this process is the building of coalitions of existing organizations around critical issues. There are successful precedents. And, organizations in this area will need to look to the private sector for funding beyond governments and individual supporters.</p>
<p>2. <i>Getting to the policy- and decision-makers</i></p>	<p>Getting to the policy- and decision-makers – is also critical because the discussion and debate need to result in action. Without the “right people around the table” the ignition of discussion will take much longer to produce results.</p>
<p>3. <i>Generating evidence and knowledge</i></p>	<p>Generating evidence and knowledge – the gaps in knowledge and evidence have to be narrowed to support the former two items and to help start to build a national plan.</p>
<p>4. <i>Creating and participating in agenda-setting event(s)</i></p>	<p>There is evidence that critical events (positive as well as negative) raise awareness of problems and issues and can prod Canadians and their authorities to action. Groups interested in advancing a national environmental health agenda will need to create positive events and “take advantage” of negative ones.</p>
<p>5. <i>Starting to build a National Environmental Health Strategic Plan</i></p>	<p>Starting to build a National Environmental Health Strategic Plan – while it is clear that the country is a long way from having such a plan, we have to be moving toward its development. Therefore, efforts such as the Suzuki Foundation’s Prescription for a Healthy Canada need broad support.</p>

Interestingly, beginning to address these factors (particularly 1-4) involves people working within their current organizations. There is no need to establish a new organization. In addition, these factors apply to all levels of community and all levels of government. It is these same factors, particularly the first four, which if successfully addressed at all levels of society can help affect the success of the fifth.

Appendix 1: Workshop Agenda

National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health
in collaboration with

Canadian Public Health Association

Workshop on the
Viability of Advancing a National Environmental Health Agenda in Canada

Sunday, June 1, 2008; 08:00-12:00; Suite 204, World Trade and Convention Centre, Halifax NS

DRAFT Objectives

- *To foster discussion about advancing a national environmental health agenda;*
- *To hear from interested participants about the underlying issues, current needs, expectations and priorities;*
- *To identify key partners and possible processes for potentially moving this forward.*

DRAFT AGENDA

8:00 – 8:30		Coffee, Tea, Muffins	
8:30 – 8:45	1	Welcome Purpose & Objectives Overview of Process	Judy Read Guernsey, Community Health and Epidemiology Frank Schwartz, Facilitator
8:45 – 10:15	2	National Perspectives	Onalee Randell, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) David Boyd, Trudeau Scholar, SFU professor, and author of the Suzuki report Ray Copes, Scientific Director of the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health
10:15- 10:30		Coffee Break	
10:30 – 11:00	3	Critical Elements for Moving Forward I	Group sessions on identifying key success requirements for moving forward to a design phase and to maximize impact
11:00 – 11:30	4	Critical Elements for Moving Forward II	A plenary session with the panel responding to group-raised Critical Success Factors
11:30- 11:50	6	Next Steps	Ranking and prioritizing the Critical Success Factors
11:50-12:00	7	Summary and Wrap-up	

Appendix 2: List of Attendees

Kari Barkhouse

Ed Kinley

Daniel Rainham

Margot Parkes

David Boyd

Christina Chociolko

Judy Guernsey

Lisa Gue

Ray Copes

Maura Ricketts

Catherine Elliott

Jeff Masuda

Mark Gibson

Becca Green

Rosemarie McKee

Onalee Randell

Ellen Sweeney

Maureen Murphy

Frank Schwartz, Facilitator

Appendix 3: Speaker Profiles

Onalee Randell, Director, Health and Environment, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, (ITK)

Onalee Randell was born in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Her close connection with the Arctic goes back to her childhood, when her family moved to Coral Harbor, and later Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. Onalee graduated and received a High School Diploma in Yellowknife, NWT. She attended the University of Winnipeg and received her diploma in Nursing in 1988. Onalee obtained her Bachelor of Science in Nursing through the University of Victoria Distance Education program in 1996. Her career at ITK began in October of 2000, and in the fall of 2001 she was appointed ITK Director of Health. Onalee has a particular interest in ensuring that the health and well-being of Inuit is recognized as it relates to environmental realities that are being experienced in the Arctic.

Slide Presentation: **Inuit Environment and Health: One Issue under Climate Change.**

David Boyd, Trudeau Scholar, Simon Fraser University professor, and author of the Suzuki report

David R. Boyd is one of Canada's leading environmental lawyers, a Trudeau Scholar at the University of British Columbia, and an adjunct professor at Simon Fraser University. David has argued environmental law cases at all levels of court, including the Supreme Court of Canada. He is the author of Prescription for a Healthy Canada: Towards a National Environmental Health Strategy; Unnatural Law: Rethinking Canadian Environmental Law and Policy; Sustainability Within a Generation: A New Vision for Canada; and almost 100 articles on environmental issues.

Slide Presentation: **Prescription for a Healthy Canada: Towards a National Environmental Health Strategy**

Ray Copes, Scientific Director of the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health

Dr. Copes completed undergraduate degrees in psychology and biosciences at Simon Fraser University, followed by his MD and MSc at McGill. After his medical degree, he completed training in Family Medicine in London, Ontario and in Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the University of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital. His first professional positions were as an occupational physician in industry and government. In 1990, he moved to Victoria to take a position as Medical Specialist, Risk Assessment & Toxicology with the BC Ministry of Health. Since 2003, Ray has been at the BC Centre for Disease Control in Vancouver where he is now Director of the Environmental Health Services Division. He is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at UBC and a faculty associate in the School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, also at UBC. Ray is also the Scientific Director for the new National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, based at the BC Centre for Disease Control.

Slide Presentation: **Environmental Sustainability and Impacts on Health: Building an Agenda**

Appendix 4: Critical Success Factors

The session was divided into three groups and each group was asked to identify the **two or three most critical factors in building a dynamic environmental health framework for Canada**. Each group reported the results of their discussions. Following are the group materials.

Group 1 – Final List

1. Information for Action (based on principles of equity, surveillance)
2. Agenda Setting Events as Catalysts (mobilization for action)
3. National Strategic Plan

Group 1 – Initial List

1. Key players (organizational and individual)
2. F/P/T/M Buy-in, engagement and motivation for action
3. Information/good science
4. Crisis/event
5. Equity/Justice approach
6. Resources and working group
7. Accountability mechanisms (incl F/P/T/M)
8. Cultural shift
9. Human capacity/training

Group 2 – Final List

Who	is driving this framework is involved - sectors, disciplines, communities, unusual suspects Champions are required at all levels, as is education and capacity building
How	Leverage points Building on existing mandates Beyond federal/provincial/municipal/territorial
What	Evidence within a conceptual framework with different stakeholders seeing where they fit
When	NOW

Group 2 – Initial List

1. Advocacy coalition of organizations – PH, environmental, aboriginal, childrens', e.g. DSF, AFN, CCS, business, and include “unusual suspects”
2. Attention on how to enable integration across/between stakeholders, sectors, disciplines, etc.
3. Conceptual framework that links and integrates stories and different “ways of knowing” so we can see where they fit for action, incl lines of responsibility how to make a difference
4. Lessons learned from other areas
5. Leveraging off other existing mandates, e.g. municipalities sustainability plans to get tax rebates
6. Who are we targeting and who makes decisions
7. Not an endpoint but a starting point (timelines, responsibilities, roles)

8. Identify links, integrating with chronic disease prevention
9. Multiple stakeholder investment and buy-in – federal/provincial vs national
10. Combine environmental health at different governance levels
11. Inter-sectoral – vertical and horizontal between and across disciplines, sectors, and communities
12. Research and education capacity building
13. True cost of environmental, social-cultural, and intergenerational effects
14. Alternative ways of measuring
15. “Precautionary Evidence” – how different from other areas?
16. Uncertainty, complexity, lack of evidence
17. Reframing environmental issues from a health perspective

Group 3 – List

1. Buy-in – politically this leads to funding
2. National organization to be a national champion, develop a network including education, training of existing professions - doctors, nurses, teachers
3. Developing key messages, from all levels of government
 - Finding common ground
 - Why it is important (burden of illness baseline, economic cost, cost benefit analysis, attach a price tag)
 - Tell the stories

Appendix 5: Session Assessment Results

The session assessment form asked three questions: (1) to what extent did the session achieve its objectives (on a scale of 1-10; where 1 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”); (2) what did the participants like best about the session; and (3) what could have been done to have made the session better. There were 13 completed forms.

(1) Twelve people scored the achievement of objectives question – two responded with a “7,” seven with an “8,” and three with a “9.” The average score being just over 8 suggests general satisfaction with the session.

(2) Many respondents noted that they were pleased with the fact that the meeting was focussed, balanced, and consistent, and that the dialogue was open and respectful. The meeting dealt with the critical issues needing discussion. The presentations were excellent. The small group work was especially appreciated.

(3) In addition to issues raised with respect to the time of day (early Sunday morning) and the time available (three hours), there were concerns expressed in two areas – that there was an insufficiency of diverse views and that there was no commitment for follow-up.