

**Comité consultatif d'experts sur la santé des enfants et l'environnement en Amérique du Nord
Consejo Consultivo de Expertos sobre Salud Infantil y Medio Ambiente en América del Norte
Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America**

January 7, 2002

The Honourable Christine Todd Whitman
EPA Administrator
US EPA Headquarters
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue
Mail Code 1101A
Washington, DC
USA 20460

Dear Governor Whitman:

It is with enthusiasm and a deep sense of commitment to children's health that we accept the invitation of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to be members of the Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America.

We understand that the role of the Expert Advisory Board is to advise the CEC Council about protecting children from environmental threats. This includes helping to set priorities in children's environmental health, identifying successful programs or strategies, noting deficiencies in surveillance programs and infrastructure, and identifying areas for trilateral collaboration.

We believe that protecting children from environmental hazards is of the utmost importance for all three countries. We also believe that working collaboratively would enhance our efforts to protect children within each country. This would also demonstrate leadership and commitment to improving the health of children.

We held our first board meeting in conjunction with the Trilateral Workshop on Children's Health and the Environment in North America in November 2001, in Montreal. As members of the Board, we participated in this workshop which focussed on a number of important topics including asthma, lead exposure, and the effects of pesticides and toxic substances.

The workshop involved a large number of well-informed and committed individuals representing the three countries, Canada, Mexico, and the United States of America. We learned directly from those involved in public health and policy making in each country how these three broad topics were being addressed and what resources for their management were available.

A strong and recurrent theme from each of the workshops, which applied to each country, was that systems for monitoring children's environmental exposures are inadequate. Moreover, even when data on exposures exist, there is usually no infrastructure to link that information with data on child health outcomes.

Although there were some notable strengths (e.g., NHANES Lead Surveillance Program in the United States, selected cancer disease registries in Canada and the United States, and the availability of data on infant mortality and certain infectious diseases in all three countries), the surveillance systems for asthma, neurodevelopment disorders, and congenital abnormalities are inadequate.

An important first step would be to expand the United State's National Children's Study to include Mexico and Canada. A trilateral collaboration would facilitate the exchange of information and resources and provide a much larger and diverse cohort of children studied in a wide variety of environments.

It was clear that the infrastructure for Children's Health and the Environment is not equally developed in the three countries. The system of Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units, supported regionally by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in the United States, provides patient care, information dissemination, and education of health care providers. The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units and Children's Environmental Health Research Centers also provide the infrastructure for monitoring programs and independent research studies.

We encourage the three North American countries to build on these experiences to create a continent-wide network of institutions and mechanisms to address children's environmental health issues, including direct patient care, environmental health education, community-based advocacy and the development of research. Such a commitment would form a necessary foundation and put us in a strong position to prevent diseases due to environmental hazards. Protecting the health of children from environmental hazards is an investment in the future of our nations.

As members of the Expert Advisory Board with a wide variety of expertise, we recognize that there are many environmental factors that have the potential to impact on children's health. We look forward to this opportunity to work collaboratively with our trilateral partners to promote the health and well-being of children in North America.

Yours sincerely,



Irena Buka, M.B. CH.B. F.R.C.P. (C)
Chair, Expert Advisory Board on Children's
Health and the Environment in North America

cc: Judith E. Ayres, Alternate Representative
Janine Ferretti, Executive Director

