

Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), Pennsylvania Cancer Coalition (PCC):

Environmental Health Workgroup (EHWG)

5/21/24 Meeting #3

Co-chairs: Dani Wilson & Fern Gilkerson

In attendance:

1. Fern Gilkerson
2. Dani Wilson
3. Ned Ketyer
4. Sue Seppi
5. Amy Whitaker
6. Jennifer King
7. Aaron Makatura
8. Johnathan Whetstine
9. Talor Musil

Announcement #1: Cancer & Environment Network of Southwestern Pennsylvania just held a very successful [Environmental Justice Summit](#).

Announcement #2: Fox Chase Cancer Center members are going to meet with Rep. Jared Soloman of the PA House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee on May 22nd to discuss policy gaps in [House Bill 2236](#) regarding occupational PFAS exposure for firefighters. They have created a bidirectional flier, with an education side and policy side to help break down barriers to education and cancer screening.

Note #1: Meetings are held on the third Tuesdays of the month from 1:00pm-2:00pm. Any new and interested members referred to this workgroup must initially use the online form found on the [PCC website](#). They must also specifically request to join the [Environmental Health Workgroup](#). Click for the [PA Cancer Coalition website](#) and click for the [PA Cancer Control Plan](#).

Note #2: [Past meeting notes can be found here](#).

Meeting Open

We began with introductions/check-ins and recapped the 9 EBIs as written in the state cancer plan. We then reiterated which EBIs were identified as priorities by workgroup members via a March 2024 poll. To streamline the process of addressing all EBIs, Dani and Fern (between this meeting and the last) filtered the feedback from the previous meeting and found it most efficient to 1) categorize the EBIs under the two categories of Education and Policy and 2) develop action steps that align with all EBI statements. This process for addressing the EBIs was reviewed with participating members and the feedback was positive and supportive. One member said it brings “synergy across topics” and will allow us to “achieve more” and “tackle more than one as they are written.” It was agreed that this new process represents a team effort to make a difference and an impact. The new EBIs arrangement is outlined below:

Education

- Educate parents about cancer risks to children associated with environmental exposures and strategies to reduce risks (radon, secondhand smoke, exposure to household and other chemicals or pollutants) [9 votes]
- Educate the public by identifying and disseminating data sources and tools on environmental carcinogen exposure risks and safe alternatives [8 votes]
- Educate health care providers on importance of environmental, social determinants and cancer risk assessments on all patients and the availability of resources [7 votes]
- Educate Pennsylvanians about safe drinking water, potential water carcinogenic contaminants, well water testing, certified water testing laboratories and available resources [5 votes]
- Educate employees and employers about environmental occupational risks such as carcinogenic chemicals, secondhand smoke, and UV exposure in the workplace to develop policies and/or safer alternatives to decrease employee exposure [3 votes]
- Use data to educate the professional community about risks associated with exposure to tobacco, radon, air pollution, chemical and other environmental cancer risk factors [4 votes]

Education Action Steps:

1. Collect data about risks associated with exposure to environmental exposures and strategies to reduce risks (ex. radon, secondhand smoke, drinking water, exposure to household and other chemicals or pollutants) and providing safe alternatives and resources for testing and products.
2. Develop and collect materials tailored to the parents, public and professionals (ex. an advocacy day at the capital, letter to representatives).
3. Engage with school districts and PTAs to provide materials, resources, and information.
4. Engage with PSR-PA, PA Medical Association, and providers to provide materials, resources, and information.

Policy

- Advance partnerships to advocate for and support policies to increase environmental justice (EJ), promote health equity, and allocate funding to create safe neighborhoods and greenspace in underrepresented communities and current EJ areas [9 votes]
- Advance partnerships to support policy changes to close loopholes and exemptions in environmental protection laws (e.g., air and water quality, tobacco laws) [7 votes]
- Advance partnerships to explore and develop policies that incentivize the replacement of priority environmental carcinogens with safer alternatives [5 votes]
- Use data to educate the policy-making community about risks associated with exposure to tobacco, radon, air pollution, chemical and other environmental cancer risk factors [4 votes]

Policy Action Steps:

1. Collect data about risks associated with exposure to tobacco, radon, air pollution [in partnership with the lung committee], chemical and other environmental cancer risk factors [EHWG].
2. Develop and collect materials to provide to legislators and regulators (ex. an advocacy day at the capital, letter to representatives).
3. Contact policy committee re: legislator and regulator contacts.

Data collection is our next step: we discussed involving the Disparities Committee and a new member who specializes in biostatistics and epidemiology to assist this workgroup to compile data that is credible, scientifically accurate, sufficient, evidence-based, and tailored to the audience and related EBI(s).

A 2025 in-person scientific summit was discussed; this would be for a mixed audience that also brings together scientists in the state. This is one way the workgroup could address EBIs and the action steps. There could be a keynote, breakouts, and combined sessions, with a final call to action. Initiatives and goals would be processed with participants.

Meeting Close

Members are asked to consider for discussion at the next meeting which subcommittee they would like to join: Education or Policy. Members will also be asked at the next meeting which demographic within Education or Policy would you like to commit to:

- Education (parents, health care professionals, employers, employees, professionals, general public)
- Policy (legislators, regulators)

Next Meetings: 3rd Tuesdays, 1pm – 2:00pm: Jul 16, Aug 20, Sep 17, Oct 15, Nov 19. We will meet monthly until the fall, then re-assess meeting frequency needs.

Next Steps

EHWG will work to recruit appropriate and interested members.

EHWG will work with other PCC workgroups and allied agencies to disseminate information and partner with them on tasks. For example, PA Alliance to Control Tobacco and the American Lung Association.

Johnathan and Amy will reach out to biostatistics and epidemiology contact to assess interest in joining this team or supporting our work.