



**Children's
Environmental
Health
Network**

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Testimony submitted by
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Children's Environmental Health Network
to
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
United States House Committee on Appropriations
regarding U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and
The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
FY2014 Appropriations

The Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN or the Network) is pleased to have this opportunity to submit testimony on FY 2014 appropriations for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). We seek funding levels of at least \$9 billion for EPA and \$76.2 million for ATSDR.

The Network's mission is to protect the developing child from environmental hazards and promote a healthier environment. The Network's Board and committee members include internationally recognized experts in children's environmental health science and policy. We recognize that children, in our society, have unique moral standing.

American competitiveness depends on having healthy educated children who grow up to be healthy productive adults. Yet, growing numbers of our children are diagnosed with chronic and developmental illnesses and disabilities, such as obesity, asthma, learning disabilities, and autism. A child's environment plays a role in these chronic conditions and contributes to the distressing possibility that today's children may be the first generation to see a shorter life expectancy than their parents due to poor health. Thus, it is vital that the Federal programs and activities that protect children from environmental hazards receive adequate resources.

CEHN urges the Subcommittee to provide funding at or above the requested levels for the following EPA activities:

- Office of Children's Health Protection
- Children's Environmental Health Research Centers of Excellence
- Office of Research & Development
- School and Child Care Environmental Health
- The Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units

CEHN also urges full funding of all activities that advance healthy school and childcare environments for all children, including those supported by ATSDR.

As epidemiologists see increasing rates of asthma, learning disabilities, and childhood cancers; as parents seek the causes of birth defects; as researchers understand more and more about the fetal origins of disease, policy makers must do a much better job of understanding and acting on the connections between children's health and the environments in which they spend their time. These environments include, but go beyond, home, school, and childcare settings. A growing number of studies are finding unexpected impacts of prenatal environmental exposures on health in later years. For example, prenatal exposures to either a common air pollutant or a common pesticide have both been linked to lower IQs and poorer working memory at age 7.

Thus, all agencies should assure that their children's programs build on and respond to the growing evidence of the importance of prenatal exposures to a child's health and future.

EPA:

A variety of factors, such as children's developing systems, their unique behaviors, and differing exposures, mean that children can be more susceptible than adults to harm from toxic chemicals. Standards and guidelines that are based on adults cannot be assumed to be protective of children. The EPA programs of highest importance in the protection of children are described below.

EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection – EPA's efforts to protect children from environmental hazards have been led by the Office of Children's Health Protection (OCHP) since 1997. Despite an effective track record, funding for OCHP has been level, at approximately \$6 million, since its creation. OCHP focuses on interagency work that promotes healthy housing and healthy children. These areas show that environmental interventions result in great cost savings, not to mention the health problems averted, such as asthma episodes and lead poisoning cases. There is great interest but few resources for these approaches.

Children's Environmental Health Research Centers of Excellence – The Centers, jointly funded by EPA and NIEHS, play a key role in providing the scientific basis for protecting children from environmental hazards. With their modest budgets, which have been unchanged for more than 10 years, these centers generate valuable research. EPA's Office of Research & Development has indicated its commitment to the Centers in the budget language. A unique aspect of these Centers is the requirement that each Center actively involve its local community in a collaborative partnership, leading both to community-based participatory research projects and to the translation of research findings into child-protective programs and policies. The scientific output of these centers has been outstanding. It was these centers, for example, that generated the findings mentioned earlier about connections between prenatal exposures and lower IQ at age 7. We urge you to provide full funding for these Centers.

Office of Research & Development (ORD) – This office is critical in efforts to understand environmental impacts on children's health. EPA has pledged to increase its efforts to provide a safe and healthy environment for children by ensuring that all EPA regulations, standards, policies, and risk assessments take into account childhood vulnerabilities to environmental

chemicals. We encourage additional funds for research on children's issues in the 2014 budget. To truly raise such research to a priority level, where are measurable goals on this area of research? Where is the documentation of the amount and type of research conducted as well as how the protection of children is given priority throughout ORD? We ask that your subcommittee direct the office to improve transparency by tracking and reporting on the funding and research across the office dedicated to children's environmental health.

ORD's focus on sustainability in its work is commended; no truly sustainable development paradigm could be developed without protecting children and their future. Children's environmental health is an issue that cuts across all of ORD's programs. For example, EPA's National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory scientists are protecting children's health through the development of cost-effective methods to test and rank chemicals for their potential to cause developmental neurotoxicity. Historic methods using laboratory animals are expensive and time consuming. To date, only a small number of the thousands of chemicals currently in commerce have been assessed for their potential toxicity and for their effects on the child's developing nervous system. These new testing methods can screen in hours to days instead of months to years and will provide faster, less expensive ways of assessing potential toxicity.

These new testing methods, however, do not replace the need for continued research in childhood exposures and health effects. Much of the research in this field cannot be conducted in a short time frame and requires sustained funding if scientists are to conduct research and measure effectiveness.

School and Child Care Environmental Health – In America today, millions of infants, toddlers and preschoolers, often as young as 6 weeks to 4-years of age, spend 40-50 hours a week in childcare. Yet, little is known about the environmental health status of the nation's childcare centers or how to assure that these facilities are protecting this highly vulnerable group of children. Environmental health is rarely if ever considered in licensing centers or training childcare professionals. Similarly, about 54 million children and nearly 7 million adults—20% of the total U.S. population—spend up to 40 hours per week inside school facilities every week. Unfortunately, many of these facilities contain unsafe environmental conditions that harm children's health and undermine attendance, achievement, and productivity. Thus, it is vital that EPA maintain and expand its activities for healthy school and child care settings, such as the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools program.

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units -- Funded jointly by EPA and ATSDR, the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) form a respected network of experts in children's environmental health, with a center in each of the U.S. Federal regions. PEHSU professionals provide medical consultation to health care professionals on a wide range of environmental health issues, from individual cases of exposure to advice regarding large-scale community issues. PEHSUs also provide information and resources to school, child care, health and medical, and community groups to help increase the public's understanding of children's environmental health, and help inform policymakers by providing data and background on local or regional environmental health issues and implications for specific populations or areas. We

urge the Subcommittee to provide adequate funding for both EPA's and ATSDR's portions of this program.

ATSDR:

CEHN urges the Subcommittee to provide funding at or above the requested levels for ATSDR activities. ATSDR uses the best science in taking public health actions, such as site assessments and toxicological profiles, to prevent harmful exposures and diseases of communities and individuals related to toxic substances.

ATSDR understands that in communities faced with contamination of their water, soil, air, or food, infants and children can be more sensitive to environmental exposure than adults and that assessment, prevention, and efforts to find remedies for exposures must focus on children because of their vulnerability and importance to the nation's future. We support the full funding of ATSDR and the continuation of their varied responsibilities.

Children's health and healthy children must be on-going priorities for this and every Administration

We commend the EPA and ATSDR for their great progress in recognizing children's unique susceptibilities to environmental toxicants in the last several decades. Much more remains to be done, however. The Network urges the Subcommittee to direct both agencies to assure that all of their activities and programs -- including regulations, guidelines, assessments and research -- specifically consider children.

EPA and ATSDR must always assure that children and other vulnerable subpopulations are protected, especially poor children, minority children, farmworker children, and others at risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on these critical issues, and thank you for your concern about the environmental health of children.