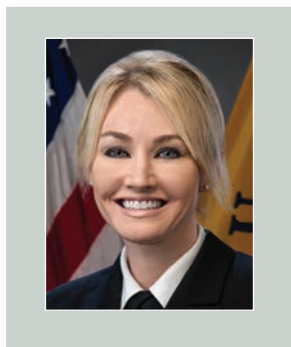


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



CDR Anna Khan,
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The Importance of Environmental Health Education and Development

The environmental health workforce represents the second largest discipline of the public health workforce, second only to nursing. In addition, the 10 Essential Public Health Services describe the public health activities that all communities should have in place and environmental health is part of those activities including “investigate, diagnose, and address health problems and hazards affecting the population” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). I find it puzzling and sometimes frustrating that environmental public health is somehow unknown to most people. How do we ensure that people know who environmental health professionals are or better yet, that our profession does not fade away? What would be the impact if we no longer exist or if we are blended into another profession that does not emphasize essential elements of life such as clean air, water, and food?

In Frank Capra's classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, when George discovers a world without his family's bank, the Baily Brothers Building and Loan, the economically disadvantaged people suffered the most. Without environmental public health, people who are at the greatest risk would suffer the most. Environmental health professionals are needed to ensure the health of the whole public.

A research brief from the de Beaumont Foundation and Public Health National Center for Innovation (2021) clearly states the need for public health professionals. The brief emphasizes that state and local health departments need to hire a minimum of 80,000 more full-time equivalent positions to provide adequate infrastructure and public health ser-

*We will continue
to champion
environmental
health education and
development for
all our members.*

vices, which is an increase of approximately 80% compared with current staffing levels. In addition, among the public health professionals needed, the brief states that there is a need for 9,500 environmental practitioners.

I think this ongoing concern has been exacerbated since the pandemic. I want, however, to bring to your attention one of the earliest instances of realization of the importance of environmental health workforce education and development. The United Nations (UN) held a conference on the human environment in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. The conference was held to bring attention to environmental health issues. During this conference, there was a decision to observe a World Environment Day every June.

This conference also led to the establishment of a World Environmental Education Day, which is observed every January. It was created to raise awareness about the importance of environmental education. World Environmental Education Day is a way to educate people about environmental issues

so they can engage effectively in conservation efforts and make informed decisions that benefit their communities and the world. By designating a specific day for environmental education, the UN aims to highlight the interconnectedness of human well-being and environmental health, encouraging global participation in sustainability efforts. By equipping people with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle pressing environmental challenges, we not only inform but also mobilize communities around the world to participate in initiatives that promote sustainability and ecological balance.

The principle of World Environmental Education Day is the belief that education should be inclusive and action-oriented. The UN emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental education into all levels of schooling, fostering critical thinking, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. And this line of thought brings us to the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and what we are doing towards these efforts. As we all know, our mission is to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce. While our members might be aware of the countless ways we look to support their empowerment and development, I want to highlight some initiatives and programs that we have in place that focus on environmental health education and development.

We have recently created an Office of Student Affairs to support students as they begin their careers. One of those ways is through free student memberships (see Sidebar). Getting an education means more

than earning a degree. Employers are looking for experience, achievements, and practical knowledge of the profession, all of which we can help our future leaders obtain. Our free student memberships will help students prepare to enter the workforce on day one. Through our network, student members also have exclusive access to mentorship programs, scholarship opportunities, and discounted rates to attend our Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition.

We also recognize that education and learning is a life-long process. So, we have programs in place to help our experienced workforce members continue to grow and develop their skills. One such program is our webinar series of the soft skills of leadership (see Sidebar). Through these recorded webinars, you can hear from experts on the current information ecosystem, effective messaging for environmental health professionals, social and emotional skills, and how to work with the media.

As we start a new year, it is customary to assess what we have accomplished over the last year and what we hope to attain in the coming several months. While many challenges in environmental public health require

careful coordination, collaboration, and compromise with our partners and policymakers, we can all agree that professional development and educational growth should be a priority. Over this year, we will continue to champion environmental health education and development for all our members regardless of where they are in their environmental health journeys. ✨



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References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *10 Essential Public Health Services*. <https://www.cdc.gov/public-health-gateway/php/about/index.html>
- de Beaumont Foundation, & Public Health National Center for Innovation. (2021, October). *Staffing up: Workforce levels needed to provide basic public health services for all Americans* [Research brief]. <https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Staffing-Up-FINAL.pdf>

Additional Resources

- National Environmental Health Association
 - Free Student Membership: www.neha.org/students
 - Leadership: The Hard Facts of Soft Skills: www.neha.org/leadership-webinar-series
- 10 Essential Public Health Services: www.cdc.gov/public-health-gateway/php/about/index.html
- Research Brief—Staffing Up: Workforce Levels Needed to Provide Basic Public Health Services: <https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Staffing-Up-FINAL.pdf>
- Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/nl7/300/05/pdf/nl730005.pdf>
- Workplace Perceptions and Experiences Related to COVID-19 Response Efforts Among Public Health Workers: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7129a3.htm

Did You Know?

You can find a listing of our scheduled webinars at www.neha.org/education/events. We offer a variety of webinars on different topics throughout the year. You can also earn continuing education contact hours toward your NEHA credential by attending our webinars.



Stand out in the crowd.
Show the world you are the environmental health expert you know you are with a credential. You might even earn more or get promoted.

neha.org/credentials

