



The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) represents more than 7,000 governmental, private, academic, and uniformed services sector environmental health professionals in the U.S., its territories, and internationally. This workforce represents the second largest constituent of the existing public health workforce, second only to nursing. We are the profession's strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental health as we deliver on our mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.

Role of Environmental Health in Addressing Environmental Justice

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NEHA acknowledges that environmental injustice is a threat to public health. Environmental injustice can result in exposure to hazardous pollutants, which can cause a range of health problems such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer, and developmental delays, among others. Communities that are disproportionately affected by environmental injustice usually lack access to the health services and resources needed to address health problems. Furthermore, environmental injustice is often correlated with racial and economic disparities, which can exacerbate health inequalities. Environmental justice is the cornerstone of NEHA's work because the health and well-being of our communities are inextricably linked to the quality of our environment. Environmental justice is not just a matter of fairness but a matter

- Uphold environmental justice. Upholding environmental justice admonishes race as a factor in the distribution of dangerous environmental burdens. Environmental justice requires the meaningful involvement of all people in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [U.S. EPA], 2023).
- Incorporate a Health in All Policies framework to inform decision making. Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative, data-driven approach to public policies across sectors that systematize



public health field has been fighting health disparities that burden people of color and vulnerable populations for decades. The environmental justice movement that started in the 1960s sought to address the inequity of environmental protection in communities of color (U.S. EPA, 2023).

Communities of color disproportionately experience severe environmental injustice, including issues related to the built environment, food deserts, gentrification, exposure to hazards, dilapidated infrastructure, health disparities, and systemic racism. These disparities are leading to both health and environmental crises that are racially motivated. The systems of oppression that play a role in the mortality of marginalized communities are perpetuating environmental injustice.

In *Understanding the Needs, Challenges, Opportunities, Vision, and Emerging Roles in Environmental Health (UNCOVER EH) Initiative*, a disproportionately high percentage (86%) of environmental health professionals self-identified their race as White (Gerding et al., 2019). Environmental justice is at the core of racism as an environmental health issue. Yet, the workforce is not representative of the marginalized and oppressed communities of color. This lack of representation in the environmental health workforce risks a loss of valued skills, inherent knowledge, and abilities to connect with diverse communities (Jones et al., 2021). Dr. Welford Roberts, NEHA president from 2009–2010, stated that diversity in the environmental health workforce is important to the success of environmental health services in communities and that the environmental health workforce should reflect the communities it supports (Roberts, 2009).

Achieving a more equally diverse environmental health workforce provides a firm understanding of cultural differences, different beliefs and attitudes toward environmental health, and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, it can potentially increase community engagement, communication, and understanding. Environmental health professionals have an opportunity to address the social injustices and systemic changes that are needed.

The environmental health field emerges from the broader public health field. We must call attention to the linkage of social determinants of health and health equity. We must apply a health equity lens when discussing the environmental health concerns that marginalized communities are facing. Within the environmental health profession, we must acknowledge the need for adhering to diverse hiring practices, identifying opportunities for cultural competency training, combating implicit biases, and combating systemic racism.

Justification

Adopting Statements on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Organizations whose operational core values reflect their commitment to justice, equity, diversity,



without discussing such efforts with their employees of color. This led to resentment by these



2013). This approach is achieved through educating policymakers on areas of health, equity, and sustainability to make the most informed and inclusive health promotion policies. Determinants of health that influence HiAP approaches are economic status, education level, systemic racism, and neighborhood characteristics and inequities (Rudolph et al., 2013). Often, policy decisions that can influence a community's health outcomes are overseen by non-health professionals in housing development, transportation, education, and criminal justice, among others. The framework of HiAP allows environmental health to be an integral part of policy development. Without HiAP, policymakers can make impactful decisions based on implicit racial biases, rather than scientifically supported data, which can negatively affect racial and ethnic minority communities and result in decades of systemic health inequity.

The value of environmental health in a community requires investment in that community's culture and expansion of health education. Access to better pharmaceuticals can reduce environmental illnesses such as asthma in communities of color, but interventions such as the reduction of pollution, improved air quality, and safer and healthy housing are more cost effective and easier to replicate in scale (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). Many big cities have begun the integration of HiAP into their environmental health policies. For example, Public Health —Seattle & King County changed the Natural Resource and Park budget to provide safer areas for physical activity in low-income neighborhoods (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). In 2013, the mayor of Washington, DC, issued an executive order on employing HiAP in the sustainability plan of the city. This plan consisted of several provisions to improve the health of low-income residents by creating more parks and green space, reducing food deserts, and increasing access to safer and healthy housing neighborhoods (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). To secure healthy outcomes for all people, environmental health professionals must ensure equitable public and environmental health investments in communities with racial and ethnic minorities.

Training on Diversity

Addressing racism and bias in the workplace goes beyond recruitment and hiring practices. Most companies implement DEI training to raise awareness and foster an inclusive atmosphere in the workplace (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). There is mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of DEI training. More studies, however, demonstrate that incorporating DEI training into the organizational culture does have positive impacts, including improving attitudes and behaviors, but these effects can be short-lived.

There are benefits to incorporating DEI training and programs that go beyond single training events. Organizations should not perceive one-off DEI trainings as a sole remedy for combatting bias and prejudice (Kalev et al., 2006). A meta-analysis of 260 studies on the effects of diversity training overall indicated positive outcomes on cognitive learning. The positive effects were greater when trainings were complimented by other diversity initiatives that target awareness of



diversity trainings at the organization level, there must be a broader strategy in place to reinforce learning and continued awareness and education.

There are many types of DEI trainings and resources. It is important to ensure that the organization implements the training in a manner that will yield positive outcomes among the workforce. The most effective diversity programs establish organizational responsibility and incorporate an accompanying organization-wide strategy that is culturally inclusive and includes regular education elements (Kalev et al., 2008). Additionally, an all-inclusive multiculturalism approach is useful for positive and effective organizational changes and to enhance employee engagement where traditional diversity approaches such as color blindness and multiculturalism have failed (Stevens et al., 2008). By implementing these strategies for diversity programs in the workplace, organizations can continue to address bias and racism that contribute to health inequities.

Diversifying Hiring Practices

According to Dr. Priscilla Oliver, NEHA president from 2019– 2020, “Diversity has increasingly become an important part of organizational operations and health” (Oliver, 2020). Employment opportunities play a vital role in economic stability; however, racial discrimination in hiring practices lead to major disparities in employment and wages. Recent studies have highlighted bias against racial and ethnic minorities in the resume screening process. Resumes that had been scrubbed of references to racial identity received twice as many calls for interviews than resumes from candidates who revealed their race (Kang et al., 2016). Similarly, there is evidence that White-sounding names receive 50% more callbacks for interviews than Black-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Additionally, in New York City, when White, Black, and Latinx job applicants used equivalent resumes to apply for hundreds of entry-level jobs, Black candidates were one half as likely as White counterparts to receive a callback for an interview (Pager et al., 2009). While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination based on race illegal, individual biases and attitudes contribute to continued systemic racism present in hiring practices.

To combat racial discrimination and bias in the workplace and to promote diversity, best practices should focus on the implementation of policies and procedures at the various stages of recruitment, hiring, and employment (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). These practices include diversifying recruitment strategies to expand the pool of eligible candidates, conducting ongoing analysis of current employment practices, creating objective qualification standards, and ensuring consistent evaluation of candidates. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission also recommends providing retention strategies such as training and mentoring to workers of all backgrounds to ensure that all employees have the same access to opportunities, skills, and experiences. These efforts can help recruit and retain a diverse leadership and workforce that more closely resembles the populations served.



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