

Balbus facilitates IOM webinar series

By Audrey Pinto

NIEHS Senior Advisor for Public Health [John Balbus, M.D.](#), played a leading role in a three-part webinar series this summer on global health and sustainable development, moderating and providing opening comments.

As NIEHS program lead for the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Roundtable Innovation Collaborative, Balbus facilitated the webinar [series](#).

(<http://www.iom.edu/Activities/Environment/EnvironmentalHealthRT/2013-MAY-23.aspx>)

The webinars were co-sponsored by NIEHS and the Pan American Health Organization and hosted by the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) Roundtable on Environmental Health Sciences, Research, and Medicine.

NIEHS continues to build a global presence

In 2012, IOM and NIEHS launched the Global Environmental Health and Sustainable Development Innovation Collaborative, with the intention of bringing together a global community of stakeholders to develop novel economic frameworks and science-based indicators, and to consider their implications for policymakers.

Since launching the NIEHS-IOM joint program, Balbus has contributed to NIEHS efforts to strengthen its global presence, with webinars in the winter of 2012 that focused on the development of a new agenda for the world, as the United Nations (U.N.) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reach their target date of 2015.

Each of this summer's webinars brought together an international panel of environmental health and economic experts from academia, government and nongovernment organizations, and professional societies, in a dialogue around health, economic development, equity, sustainability, and environmental challenges, with the goal of stimulating new solutions for future generations.

Looking at new indicators to determine sustainability

At the opening of the first webinar May 23 on [Health in the Context of Sustainable Economic Frameworks](#), (<http://www.iom.edu/Activities/Environment/EnvironmentalHealthRT/2013-MAY-23/Webinar%204.aspx>)

Balbus noted that the economic health of a nation is usually measured by its gross domestic product (GDP). "But, of late, there has been interest in going beyond GDP and using other indicators," he said. Three speakers proposed several new indices, including measures of both mental and physical well-being, as well as the human health impact of environmental exposures and risk.

With the second webinar June 27 on [Health in the Context of Global Climate Change](#),

(<http://www.iom.edu/Activities/Environment/EnvironmentalHealthRT/2013-JUN-27/Webinar5.aspx>)

Balbus introduced the topic of developing credible scenarios for predicting future health effects of climate change. He pointed out that to understand how climate change will affect future generations, we must first understand what the future world will look like. "We have to improve the models we use," Balbus explained, "and we have to be able to produce rigorous and credible scenarios of the future to support these predictive efforts and these models."

The speakers then outlined a set of shared socioeconomic pathways that are being developed to aid in the modeling and analysis of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and suggested ways of disseminating information on these climate change scenarios.

In the final seminar July 25 on [Health in the Context of U.N. Processes to Develop Post-2015 Goals and Sustainable Development Agenda](#),

(<http://www.iom.edu/Activities/Environment/EnvironmentalHealthRT/2013-JUL-25.aspx>)

three speakers outlined recommendations for going beyond the MDGs set for 2015 and discussed opportunities to inform the global community on health information for decision-making and to raise awareness of the health implications.

The discussions included integrating the role of health in a broader context in the post-2015 MDGs, emphasizing the importance of universal health coverage, linking potential indicators of health and sustainability to reflect policies that enhance



Balbus is a principal of the U.S. Global Change Research Program, leading NIEHS efforts on [climate change](#) and human health. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

sustainability and improve health, and improving the possibility of greater resilience of populations to adverse environmental conditions.

(Audrey Pinto, Ph.D. is technical editor for the journal Environmental Health Perspectives.)

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