

PEPH webinar highlights environmental health literacy

By Audrey Pinto

NIEHS has long championed communication strategies and health messages aimed at building public awareness of the effects of environmental exposures on human health and reinforces that commitment through the NIEHS [2012-2017 Strategic Plan](#). Through the Partnerships for Environmental Public Health (PEPH) program, NIEHS also highlights the important contributions grantees make to environmental health literacy (EHL).

To initiate a broader discussion, PEPH organized a June 24 webinar on the topic, with two recognized experts in the fields of health and environmental literacy. [Michael Paasche-Orlow, M.D.](http://www.bumc.bu.edu/medicine/faculty/paasche-orlow/), of the Boston University School of Medicine, and [Anna Hoover, Ph.D.](http://www.uky.edu/publichealth/about/faculty-and-staff-directory/anna-goodman-hoover), of the University of Kentucky (UK) College of Public Health, discussed the definitions and metrics used to measure EHL. The presenters highlighted the relationship between health literacy and health outcomes, and how this knowledge may be applied to the emerging field.

Building a framework and working definition

Paasche-Orlow discussed the importance of developing a clear, workable definition of EHL. "When launching a new endeavor like EHL, the definition should be operational and flow into tool development and measurement," he said.

He also noted the need to develop a conceptual model to examine causal pathways between EHL and health outcomes. "It should include input from multiple disciplines and community-based organizations, to identify the appropriate skills, tasks, and contexts that work within the EHL domain to achieve successful outcomes."

At the intersection of environmental literacy and health literacy

Hoover proposed that the definition of EHL should draw from the convergent themes of health literacy and environmental literacy. "EHL requires a multidisciplinary team to develop, craft, and share important messages about the environment, so that the public and policy makers can make informed decisions," she said.

"This is an exciting time to be involved in this emerging field, and we have many opportunities to provide intentional development in defining EHL," she continued. "We have a lot work to do to promote a basic understanding of environmental health issues that can support evidence-based decisions at the individual and community levels."

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

PEPH annual meeting to focus on EHL

The PEPH annual meeting will bring together multidisciplinary teams to examine the issue of EHL. The three-day event will take place Sept. 22-24 at NIEHS.

For further information and details about the meeting, see the [2014 PEPH annual meeting](http://tools.niehs.nih.gov/conference/peph_annual_meeting_2014/index.cfm) website.



With support from the National Cancer Institute and National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, Paasche-Orlow employs behavioral informatics to empower people with limited health literacy to overcome literacy barriers, both in terms of personal health and informed consent. (Photo courtesy of Angelo Volandes)



Hoover is deputy director of the Public Health Practice-Based Research Networks National Coordinating Center (<http://www.publichealthsysstem.org/pbrn.aspx>) She also leads communication and translation efforts for the NIEHS-funded Superfund Research Program at UK. (Photo courtesy of Anna Hoover)

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(bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

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