



Addressing Public Health and Chemical Exposures

An Action Agenda

The *National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical exposures* was a two-year project supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). With the vision that **chemicals should be used and managed in ways that are safe and healthy for all people**, the *National Conversation* developed an Action Agenda with recommendations for strengthening efforts to protect the public from harmful chemical exposures. Participants from federal, tribal, state, local government agencies; non-governmental organizations; community and environmental justice groups; academia; and industry have worked together to propose actionable steps to achieve this vision.

Since the *National Conversation's* launch in June 2009, six project work groups contributed detailed, topic-specific reports, and thousands of interested individuals from across the nation participated in community conversations and multi-day web dialogues. The *National Conversation's* Leadership Council used this input to inform the Action Agenda.

Key Recommendations for Addressing Public Health and Chemical Exposures

The *National Conversation* Action Agenda calls on a range of sectors to advance our nation's progress in the areas of prevention, monitoring, scientific understanding, serving communities, public education and engagement, health professional workforce capacity, and chemical emergencies. The Action Agenda contains 48 recommendations, including 19 featured recommendations and 29 additional recommendations. Featured recommendations for each chapter are listed below. The full action agenda is accessible at www.nationalconversation.us.

Prevention

Public Health Problem:

Chemicals policy in the United States tends not to emphasize primary prevention—the elimination or reduction of the causes of health problems.

Featured Recommendations:

- Promote the substitution of hazardous chemicals with less toxic alternatives
- Reform the Toxic Substances Control Act and enact similar state legislation
- Protect children's health

Monitoring

Public Health Problem:

The ongoing collection, integration, analysis, and interpretation of data about chemical sources, uses, associated exposures, and potential health outcomes is partial, uneven, and minimally integrated.

Featured Recommendations:

- Improve the quality, quantity, accessibility, and comparability of health outcome data
- Expand biomonitoring capacity and use biomonitoring to prioritize public health actions
- Enhance reporting of information on chemical source, use, and release

Science

Public Health Problem:

We lack critical information on the health effects of chemicals, individual susceptibility, disproportionate vulnerability and effects from past exposures, and effectiveness of interventions to protect public health.

Featured Recommendations:

- Identify, validate, and use novel approaches to evaluate chemical hazards
- Develop targeted data to fill gaps in the scientific knowledge of the health risks of chemicals
- Characterize human exposures to chemicals across product life cycles and human life stages

Communities

Public Health Problem:

Some communities and subpopulations are disproportionately exposed to and affected by harmful chemicals.

Featured Recommendations:

- Take action to protect communities disproportionately affected by chemical exposures
- Broaden the scope of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's public health actions

Public Engagement

Public Health Problem:

Despite communication efforts and attention to environmental issues in the media, the public is often unaware of issues related to chemical exposures until they are affected by an exposure event or concern.

Featured Recommendations:

- Develop a multidirectional communication model for government agency use
- Improve public availability and clarity of chemical information on products throughout the supply chain
- Develop current and comprehensive environmental and occupational health education for grades K-16

Health Professionals

Public Health Problem:

Health care providers and other health professionals are often unprepared to address health concerns related to chemical exposures.

Featured Recommendations:

- Incorporate environmental and occupational health into health professional education
- Educate, mentor, and hire environmental and occupational health professionals from under-resourced and historically marginalized communities

Emergencies

Public Health Problem:

Our capacity to respond to chemical emergencies is limited by inadequate coordination, communication, laws, and the lack of needed data.

Featured Recommendations:

- Establish a set of federal priorities related to chemical emergency planning and preparedness
- Develop chemical emergency guidance values that represent risks faced by first responders and the public
- Coordinate, unify, and integrate federal, tribal, state, and local government efforts related to chemical emergencies

Learn more: www.nationalconversation.us

