

AAMR Position Statement on Environmental Health

Policy Statement

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to live, work, learn, worship and play in environments that are healthy and safe.

Issue

Environmental health can be defined as "freedom from illness or injury related to exposure to toxic agents and other environmental conditions that are potentially detrimental to human health" ¹. Environmental exposures play a key role in human growth and development, maintenance of health and in the development of disability and disease ^{2,3}. The health impacts of contaminated homes, work places and communities pose a greater risk for the developing fetus, children, and people who already have compromising health issues and are faced with health disparities greater than the general population because they are uniquely vulnerable. This includes those living with an intellectual or developmental disability. Advocacy around environmental health involves working to reduce the environmental hazards that contribute to intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to minimize further risks to health for people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Position

Numerous pollutants in the environment including contaminants such as lead, mercury, pesticides, carbon monoxide, radon, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), brominated flame retardants and solvents, can affect brain development and function and contribute to adverse health outcomes and health disparities⁴.

With regards to environmental health, our constituents must:

- Have the right to live in homes that are healthy and safe and do not increase risks to health.
- Have the right to safe and healthy food and water
- Have the right to a safe workplace that is free from recognized safety and health hazards⁵.
- Have the right to work in settings that are in compliance with OSHA standards.
- Have the right to be informed of known workplace hazards and to be provided with training and equipment to minimize risks to health.
- Have the right to live, learn, worship and play in communities that are healthy and safe and do not exacerbate health conditions.
- Have the same degree of protection as other citizens from environmental health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.
- Have the right to be supported by organizations, agencies, and staff who are knowledgeable about the effects of environment on health and how to minimize risks.
- Have the right to be protected in community-based residential settings, by regulations that incorporate standards for safe and healthy environments.
- Have the right and responsibility to be educated and empowered with knowledge about risks to health from the environment and to make decisions to decrease exposure.

With regard to developing fetus and children:

- Have the right to develop in an environment that is free from contaminants that can result in intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Adopted by the AAMR Board of Directors on April 17, 2006

References:

1. Pope AM, Snyder MA, Mood LH, eds. *Nursing, Health & the Environment, Institute of Medicine Report* . Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1995.
2. Healthy People 2010. Environmental Health. Retrieved 3/24/06 from <http://www.healthypeople.gov/Document/HTML/Volume1/08Environmental.htm> .
3. Schroeder, S.R., (2000). Mental retardation and developmental disabilities influenced by environmental neurotoxic insults. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 108(S3).
4. Schettler, T., Stein, J., Reich, F., Valenti, M.,(2000). In Harm's Way: Toxic Threats to Child Development Project Addressing Toxic Chemical Influences on Developmental Disabilities. Retrieved 3/24/06 from <http://psr.igc.org/iHW-download-report.htm> .
5. U.S Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration. Worker Rights Under The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1970. Retrieved 3/24/06 from <http://www.osha.gov/as/opa/worker/rights.html> .