

Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health: Tool for Community Environmental Health Assessment



Many communities face disproportionate health risks. Environmental factors and underlying economic and social challenges can generate some of those risks. And a lack of trust between residents and government can worsen them. The Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH) offers a method for engaging communities to identify their health concerns, take action on their environmental health problems, and improve their health and quality of life.

Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health

PACE EH is a community involvement tool. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collaborated

to develop it. PACE EH guides communities and local health officials in conducting community-based environmental health assessments. PACE EH draws on community collaboration and environmental justice principles to involve the public and other stakeholders in

- Identifying local environmental health issues,
- Setting priorities for action,
- Targeting populations most at risk, and
- Addressing identified issues.

Why Use PACE EH in Your Community?

Most importantly, PACE EH processes can lead to action on those environmental health issues that both affect health and address community needs. The Florida Department of Public Health used a PACE EH process in the community of Wabasso. Private and public leaders in Wabasso identified their top health issues as

- Safe and healthy housing,
- Community safety from violence and drug trafficking,
- Street lighting,
- Accessible areas for safe physical activity and recreation,
- Access to safe drinking water, and
- Solutions to septic system failures and access to a municipal wastewater system.

National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services



The PACE EH process led to several civic improvements. Streetlights and sidewalks were installed. Abandoned homes were removed and existing homes repaired. Water lines were installed, septic systems improved, and parks enhanced, including addition of a walking trail. The local health agency could not address these problems on its own. But health agency staff often knew whom to contact within the local government or community. Because of the improvements, survey respondents reported several benefits. Outdoor physical activity increased (80%), sense of well-being improved (94%), and trust in government to address concerns increased (91%). A \$30,000 investment in the local health department's staff time yielded more than \$1.5 million in improvements.



Not all communities that have undertaken PACE EH have conducted short- and long-term impact evaluations. Still, a process evaluation across several sites noted that implementing a community environmental health assessment such as PACE EH resulted in

- Built networks and collaboration
- Improved knowledge and skills in environmental health and collaboration
- Increased awareness of environmental health concerns
- Increased trust between collaborators
- Strengthened perception of the health agency as leader



PACE EH can also help to implement several of the 10 Essential Environmental Public Health Services. These services are modeled on the 10 Essential Public Health Services and can be a tool for quality improvement. One of the services is to inform, educate, and empower people about environmental health issues, and another is to mobilize community partnerships and actions to identify and solve environmental health problems. PACE EH can also help assure a competent environmental health workforce—another essential service. PACE EH improves the environmental health decision-making process by strengthening community involvement so that public values and priorities are considered.



PACE EH and Community Involvement Resources

Several free resources are available for local health officials and community organizations:

www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ceha

<http://www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/CEHA/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Home/HealthService.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/od/ocphp/nphpsp/essentialphservices.htm>