



**PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION**  
of Australia Inc

## **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH JUSTICE POLICY**

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:***

1. Environmental discrimination is defined as a group of people being exposed inequitably to environmental hazards in their communities, workplaces and schools.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Environmental health justice demands strategies and processes in the resolution of inequalities related to environmental contamination.<sup>2-7</sup>
2. Australian families of low socioeconomic status, those living in rural areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island families continue to have significantly poorer health status than other Australians.<sup>8</sup>
3. Children have little control over their own lives. Where they live and play, what they eat, and their financial circumstances are determined by others.<sup>2</sup> Children of socioeconomically disadvantaged families are exposed more frequently than other children to potentially dangerous chemicals and other environmental hazards that can affect health.<sup>2,3,9,13-15.</sup>
4. In-utero exposures to environmental health hazards may constitute a source of inequity between generations.
5. Through the enHealth Council there is work in progress towards the development of national environmental health indicators.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia affirms the following principles:***

6. Australia is a signatory to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which states;  
*“In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation, a statement known as the Precautionary Principle.”<sup>9</sup>*
7. Guiding principles for the Australian Charter for Environmental Health include the protection of human health. This is stated as “Protect human health by identifying threats posed by environmental hazards as early as possible and by introducing appropriate safeguards. Ideally these should be sustainable and cost-effective”.<sup>16, 18</sup>
8. The health of children and young people is important to the health of future generations. Societies have a social and ethical responsibility to ensure that children are provided with opportunities that optimise their health and wellbeing.

***The Public Health Association of Australia believes that the following steps should be undertaken:***

9. A national dialogue on collaborative models to achieve environmental health justice needs to be championed by the enHealth collaboration and must focus on the development of concepts and frameworks of environmental health justice that can be incorporated into broad national policies.
10. The Precautionary Principle needs to be adopted and fully incorporated at all levels of government as a primary guide to all policy development program implementation and decision-making including health and environmental decision-making.
11. Principles such as environmental health justice should be incorporated in the development process for national environmental health indicators by the enHealth Council.
12. The Principles of environmental health justice also need to be adopted and fully incorporated at all levels of government as a primary guide to all policy development program implementation and decision-making including health and environmental decision-making.

***The Public Health Association of Australia resolves to undertake the following actions:***

**The Board, Branches and the Environmental Health and Child Health SIGs will:**

13. Work in partnership with government and non-government organizations to develop and implement a comprehensive intersectoral national strategy to reduce the impact of environmental hazards on the health of Australians, especially children and the indigenous population.
14. Write to the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) enHealth, the Commonwealth and State/Territory ministries of health and the environment seeking support for substantial funding for research programs aimed at:
  - understanding the causes of environmental damage to individuals and populations with an emphasis on vulnerable groups; and,
  - Identification and trialling of strategies that reduce environmental health risks and optimise opportunities for health and well-being for all Australians.
15. Advocate for the protection of children and other vulnerable groups from environmental health hazards and the inclusion of the welfare of these groups in health impact assessments and policy development on an on-going basis.

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