



The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) represents more than 7,000 governmental, private, academic, and uniformed services sector environmental health professionals in the U.S., its territories, and internationally. NEHA is the profession’s strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental health as it delivers on its mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.

## Policy Statement on the Role of Environmental Health in Addressing Racism as an Environmental Health Issue

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According to Dr. Camara Jones, “Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call ‘race’), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources” (American Public Health Association, 2020).

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) acknowledges that racism is a threat to public health. It threatens public health through fostering race-based differences in access to and quality of healthcare. Racism can be found at the center of poverty and limited employment opportunities, poor investment in education, and adverse environmental exposures. Racism fuels health disparities—the systemic consequences of social determinants of health. For example, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has exposed how health disparities and higher pollution exposures may

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## Justification

### Developing Statements on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Issuing values statements on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion can contribute to a culture of inclusion and equity, as well as broaden awareness. These statements can enable diversity to be integrated into the structure of the mission and vision of an agency. The Green 2.0 Working Group calls for institutionalizing diversity, equity, and inclusion goals through their reflection in mission statements, workplans, funding requests, etc. The working group researched environmental insti-

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health of a community and eliminating racial environmental injustice.

### Health in All Policies

HiAP strives to improve the health of all members of a community through the deliberation of collective decision-making of various community sectors and policy development (Rudolph, Caplan, Mitchell, Ben-Moshe, & Dillon, 2013). This process is achieved through educating policy makers on areas of health, equity, and sustainability in order to create the most informed and inclusive health promotion policies. Determinants of health that influence HiAP approaches are economic status, highest level of education attained, systemic racism, and neighborhood characteristics and inequities (Rudolph et al., 2013). Often, policy decisions that can influence a community's health outcomes are overseen by nonhealth professionals in housing development, transportation, education, and criminal justice, among others. The HiAP framework allows environmental health to be an integral part of policy development. Without HiAP, policy makers might make impactful decisions based on implicit racial biases rather than scientifically supported data, which can negatively affect communities of color and result in decades of systemic health inequity.

The value of environmental health in a community requires investment in that community's culture and expansion of health education. Access to better pharmaceuticals can reduce environmental illnesses such as asthma in communities of color but interventions such as pollution reduction, better air quality, and safer and cleaner housing free of mold and pest are more cost effective and easier to replicate in scale (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). Many big cities have begun to integrate HiAP into their environmental health policies. For example, Seattle/King County has changed their natural resources and parks budget to provide safer areas for physical activity in low-income neighborhoods (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). In 2013, the mayor of Washington, DC, issued an executive order on employing HiAP in the city's sustainability plan. This plan consisted of several provisions to improve the health of the city's low-income residents by creating more parks and green space, reducing food deserts, and increase access to safer and healthier housing neighborhoods (Wernham & Teutsch, 2015). In order to secure healthy outcomes for all residents, environmental health professionals must ensure equitable public and environmental health investments in communities of color.

### Training on Diversity

Addressing racism and bias in the workplaces goes beyond recruitment and hiring practices. Most companies implement diversity training as a way to raise awareness and foster an inclusive atmosphere in the workplace (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). There is mixed evidence when looking at the effectiveness of diversity training but more studies demonstrate that incorporating diversity training into the organizational culture does have positive impacts, including improving attitudes and behaviors, though these effects may be short-lived.

There are, however, benefits to incorporating diversity training and programs that go beyond single training events and organizations should not see one-off diversity trainings as a sole

remedy for combatting biases and prejudices (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). A meta-analysis of 260 studies of the effects of diversity training overall indicates positive outcomes on the effects on cognitive learning. The positive effects were greater when trainings were complimented by other diversity initiatives that targeted awareness of biases and skill development and occurred over a longer period of time (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). When incorporating diversity trainings at the organization level, there must be a broader strategy in place to reinforce learnings and continued awareness and education.

There are many types of diversity trainings and resources that exist and it is important to ensure that organizations implement the trainings in a manner that will yield positive outcomes within the workforce. The most effective diversity programs are those that establish organizational responsibility and incorporate an accompanying organization-wide strategy that is culturally inclusive and includes regular education elements (Kalev et al., 2006). Additionally, an all-inclusive multiculturalism approach is useful for positive and effective organizational changes and enhances employee engagement where traditional diversity approaches such as color blindness and multiculturalism have failed (Stevens, Platt, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). By implementing these strategies for diversity programs in the workplace, organizations can continue to address biases and racism that contribute to health inequities.

#### Diversifying Hiring Practices

According to NEHA President Dr. Priscilla Oliver, "Diversity has

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retention strategies such as training and mentoring to workers of all backgrounds to ensure that all employees have the same access to opportunities, skills, and experiences. These efforts will help recruit and retain a diverse leadership and workforce that more closely resembles the populations served.

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