



Collaborative on Health and the Environment
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, June 5, 2012

CONTACT: Maria Valenti,
Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE)
Ph: 978-590-4844 - mvalenti@igc.org

**“Healthy Environments Across Generations” –
the first ‘unconference’ for promoting health across the lifespan**

(New York City) - Where will you find an acclaimed neuroscientist who has challenged the concept of Alzheimer's providing a simulcast to an international SharpBrains conference, a design engineer and performance artist demonstrating how multiple environments affect human health, and a young director fostering one of New York's burgeoning community farms gathered this week? At the New York Academy of Medicine's (NYAM's) “Healthy Environments Across Generations” June 7-8 event, exploring environmental influences on health across the lifespan with other cutting-edge leaders from myriad disciplines.

“We’re calling this an ‘unconference’ because nothing like this has ever been held at NYAM—or anywhere else really,” said Peter Whitehouse, MD, PhD, a leading geriatric neurologist and co-founder of The Intergenerational School, who serves on the planning committee. “We want to energize a movement of ‘Intergenerativity’ – meaning the integration of science, creativity and wisdom. Now is the time to spawn collaborative, innovative and intergenerational actions that can address all these different environments and ultimately improve human and planetary health.”

Over 150 researchers, urban planners, agricultural experts, intergenerational advocates, environmental health and justice promoters, health professionals, philanthropists, artists and many others from a wide range of sectors are gathering for this forum. It has been organized by the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE), in partnership with AARP, the U.S. EPA Aging Initiative, The Intergenerational School, The Whole Child Center, the Children's Environmental Health Center at Mt. Sinai Medical Center, Gray is Green, and WEACTION for Environmental Justice, and now has over 60 cosponsors.

This gathering will feature a number of conversational forums about the built, food, chemical, natural, psychosocial, and socioeconomic environments, and how they interact and impact health. Opportunities to have inspired discussions with other participants, usually only done at the breaks or in the hallways between sessions, are also fully incorporated into the design of the meeting. “I like to say we’re having no PowerPoint presentations, but plenty of “present” people creating empowering points of connection,” Whitehouse added.

In addition, those helping to frame the content—including a former director of the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences now newly appointed director of the U.S. EPA's National Center on Environmental Assessment and the Human Health Risk Assessment Research Program, a stalwart social justice philanthropist, a national health care policy reform leader, a built environment expert and many others - will discuss practices and policies, including

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intergenerational approaches which can promote health at all ages.

This meeting is fundamentally a response to a century of change in multiple environments that has caused major changes in the pattern and distribution of diseases. These changes are fueling dramatic increases in some chronic diseases and conditions, such as diabetes and obesity. A number of health problems that previously were considered later-life diseases are now occurring in younger people, and some midlife diseases are now understood as risk factors for diseases associated with older persons. With a near doubling of the over-65 population in the next few decades, this trajectory threatens to overwhelm our health care system and our social resources.

“Bad community design is contributing to a range of rising public health concerns, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, cancer and depression,” said Richard Jackson, MD, MPH, an internationally-renowned public health leader and host of a provocative new 4-hour PBS series, *Designing Healthy Communities*, who will serve as a content framer for this event. “We can only reverse escalating chronic diseases as well as health care costs by developing neighborhoods explicitly designed to increase health and well-being—that means taking into account everything from making walking and biking easy to enabling social interactions to access to healthy food.”

“Until we look upstream to address social inequality and environment injustice,” Gail Christopher, DN, Vice President of Program Strategy at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and another content framer at this meeting, noted, “we will continue to see families sliding into poverty, youth dropping out of school, and communities becoming overwhelmed by pollution and despair. This conference gives me hope that we will find a way out of this untenable situation, and instead, work together across the many divides that now exist to rebuild a healthy Commons for all.”

Artistic expressions of dance, music and poetry will be interwoven throughout the event to remind participants that creativity and imagination, not just data, are needed to develop ‘real-world’ solutions to address these complex issues. In addition, special post-conference activities offered Friday afternoon, including a “wellness tour” of the Central Park Conservatory Gardens, will allow attendees to explore new ways of perceiving the many environments that influence our health.

“Ultimately, we do not see the conference as an end unto itself—nor one with real walls or boundaries. Instead, it is a stepping stone in our ongoing journey to galvanize a health-focused, multi-generational movement,” stated Rick Moody, Director, AARP Office of Academic Affairs, who serves on the planning committee for the conference. “We expect this gathering to result in new, even unexpected, collaborations to help us collectively cross the tumultuous waters of today’s political, economic and social situations. I know those coming to this meeting are committed to working together towards a future where prevention is the topmost priority and enjoying the healthiest possible life is a right for all, not a privilege for a few.”

For more information, please see:

<http://www.healthandenvironment.org/news/conference/intergen2012>

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