

Environmental Justice Strategic Plan

**Pennsylvania
Department of Health**

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pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Table of Contents

Letter from the Secretary of Health	3
Executive Summary	4
Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Collaboration	6
Environmental Justice Internal Strategies	7
Environmental Justice External Strategy	10
References	11

Letter from the Secretary

December 28, 2022

Greetings,

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (department) is committed to the vision of a healthy Pennsylvania for all. Embedded in that vision is the word *all*. As we examine environmental justice, we know that many Pennsylvanians have been disproportionately affected by environmental hazards, through no fault of their own.

On October 28, 2021, Governor Wolf signed Executive Order 2021-07 related to environmental justice. The executive order outlines activities for state agencies to address environmental justice, including establishing the Environmental Justice Interagency Council. The department is pleased to be a member of the Environmental Justice Interagency Council. The executive order also states that each agency shall develop and post online a strategic plan to promote environmental justice in ways tailored to the specific agency and its authority, mission, and programs.

The department has done work in this space to highlight the vulnerability of environmental justice communities, through our Office of Health Equity and our [Environmental Health Indicators Map](#).

At the same time, we know that there is additional work that is needed. This strategic plan assigns the department several internal activities, and a few external activities, to further the department's involvement in this community. There are opportunities for the department to collaborate with partners, including other state agencies, to achieve these objectives.

Throughout this process, we are committed to working closely with those who live in, represent, and advocate for communities that have been disproportionately affected from an environmental justice perspective. We have worked with external stakeholders representing these communities to review this plan and will be working with them and additional stakeholders as we carry out the strategies described within.

Thank you,



Denise A. Johnson, MD, FACOG, FACHE
Acting Secretary of Health and
Pennsylvania Physician General

Executive Summary

The built environments where people live, work, learn, and play have a major role in determining health outcomes. All people, regardless of social, political, economic, or structural factors, deserve a healthy and safe environment. The Pennsylvania Constitution codifies this in Article 1, Section 27, the Environmental Rights Amendment, which states that “people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment”.¹

However, many Pennsylvanians are disproportionately impacted by poor environmental conditions. Certain groups, such as people of color, immigrants, and those living below the poverty line, experience disproportionately high adverse health effects related to environmental factors. Those most affected by environmental threats are often unable to address and respond to them. The geographic areas wherein individuals have a higher burden of adverse environmental and health effects, classified by structural and socioeconomic inequity and environmental racism, are referred to as environmental justice (EJ) communities.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines EJ as:

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys:

- *The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and*
- *Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.*²

In Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) defines EJ communities as areas with low income and high minority populations. Historically these groups have been left out of environmental policy and decision-making.³ DEP has mapped these locations, available [here](#).⁴ DEP’s Office of Environmental Justice and the Commonwealth’s Environmental Justice Interagency Council (EJIC) seek to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those who are typically excluded from environmental discussions and those who live, work, learn and play in designated EJ areas, are meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect their communities, including the built environment.

As a member of EJIC, DOH developed an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan to prioritize EJ within the department as a part of its mission and vision. The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is to promote healthy behaviors, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all people in Pennsylvania. DOH’s vision

¹ <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=0>

² <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

³ <https://www.dep.pa.gov/PublicParticipation/OfficeofEnvironmentalJustice/pages/default.aspx>

⁴ <https://padep-1.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f31a188de122467691cae93c3339469c>

is to attain a healthy Pennsylvania for all. Through the mission and vision, DOH emphasizes the importance of advancing health equity, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines as “the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health”.⁵ It is critical to address the disproportionate burden of adverse environmental health effects impacting those living in EJ communities to achieve health equity.

The following strategic plan (plan) outlines specific strategies and activities to prioritize EJ and its connection to attaining DOH’s vision of a healthy Pennsylvania for all. The strategies and activities are separated into internal and external categories to promote the inclusion of EJ considerations within existing DOH program areas and in other state agencies and organizations across the Commonwealth. The plan includes the following strategies, and is intended to be shared with stakeholders and integrated into the department’s Strategic Plan for 2024-2027:

- Increase awareness of EJ and the connection between EJ and health equity among DOH staff;
- Strengthen DOH’s EJ, health equity, and climate change programmatic oversight;
- Integrate EJ and health equity principles into grant and contract processes;
- Collaborate with state agencies to promote EJ and health equity; and
- Strengthen engagement with EJ communities.

In addition to connecting EJ and health equity, the strategies included in the plan highlight the importance of addressing climate change. Individuals living in EJ communities are disproportionately susceptible to climate change threats and their corresponding public health impacts.⁶ A focus on the impacts of climate change is a key component to improving the adverse health outcomes associated with living in EJ communities.

The development of the EJ Strategic Plan provides a framework for continuing and building on DOH’s efforts to address health disparities associated with environmental hazards. The plan supports efforts to assess environmental health threats, such as DOH’s Environmental Health Indicators Map⁷, and offers a roadmap for addressing environmental justice, health equity, and climate change through a public health perspective.

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/Public%20Health%20Impacts%20of%20Climate%20Change%20Threats%20in%20Pennsylvania.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.phaim1.health.pa.gov/env-health-map/>

Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Collaboration

In October 2021, Governor Tom Wolf signed Executive Order 2021-07 to prioritize EJ throughout the Commonwealth. The order outlined several executive actions to address EJ, including establishing the Environmental Justice Interagency Council (EJIC). The EJIC consists of the Secretaries or their designees from the following state agencies:

- The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection;
- The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources;
- The Department of Education;
- The Department of Agriculture;
- The Department of Health;
- The Department of Transportation;
- The Department of Community and Economic Development; and
- Such other Cabinet members or agency heads or their designees as determined by the Governor.

The EJIC is tasked with providing input to DEP's EJ plan development and implementation; identifying and making recommendations to the Governor's Office to address potential disproportionate environmental impacts that state laws and regulations may have on EJ areas; recommending processes to incorporate EJ into executive agencies' decision-making; and recommending a comprehensive EJ training plan for executive branch Commonwealth agencies.

Each participating EJIC agency is required to develop a strategic plan every five years to promote EJ within their agency, in ways tailored to its authority, mission, and programs.⁸ While several divisions, offices, and programs within DOH have been implicitly working to address EJ related issues over the last several years (e.g., private well water quality and asthma control and prevention), there remains significant work to be done. This strategic plan provides a roadmap of future DOH activities to help reaffirm DOH's commitment and plan to ensure a healthy Pennsylvania for all.

Following the lead of DEP's Office of EJ, which heads the EJIC, DOH intends to solicit and incorporate community feedback into the implementation of this plan and future iterations of the plan. We acknowledge that representation and input must be inclusive of those who live, work, learn and play in communities disproportionately affected by environmental injustice and health inequity. To accomplish this, DOH will share this strategic plan with a group of partners who are trusted and most able to solicit feedback from EJ communities. When the plan is published, it will be shared widely with other public health stakeholders, including community-based organizations, universities, and local health departments, to garner further feedback regarding how DOH can best meet the needs of EJ communities.

Environmental Justice Internal Strategies

Strategy 1: Increase Awareness of EJ and the Connection Between EJ and Health Equity Among DOH Staff

TO: Strengthen DOH understanding of the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on Pennsylvania residents living in EJ areas and increase application of EJ principles and initiatives across DOH programs.

FOR: DOH staff

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

1. Develop EJ and climate change training and competencies for all DOH staff (existing and new).
2. Develop high-level guidelines identifying opportunities to integrate health equity and EJ initiatives into DOH organizational decision-making and program development.
3. Establish resources to assist DOH staff with the integration of EJ, health equity, and climate change into their respective program areas.
4. Develop an EJ and climate change communications plan, including regular internal messaging to all DOH staff.

LEADER: Office of Health Equity, Health and Human Services Training Center, Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology, Communications Office

SO THAT: EJ principles are incorporated into DOH programs to increase focus and understanding of the health needs of residents living in EJ areas.

MEASURES/TARGETS:

- Goal of 75% of staff trained within six months of launch of course
- Require course for onboarding of *all* new staff and annually for all staff
- Guidance created (Y/N)
- Number of organizational opportunities for health equity and EJ integration
- Number of resources made available to DOH staff
- Communications plan created (Y/N)

Strategy 2: Strengthen DOH's EJ, Health Equity, and Climate Change Programmatic Oversight

TO: Ensure DOH programs focus on the health needs of residents living in EJ areas, and to the extent possible, integrate EJ, health equity and climate change principles and initiatives.

FOR: DOH staff, Pennsylvania residents living in EJ areas

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

1. Assess DOH's capacity to address health needs of residents living in EJ communities.
2. Establish an internal Health Equity Advisory Board.
3. Develop program-specific EJ and health equity plans across DOH in collaboration with the DOH Health Equity Advisory Board.
4. Establish DOH Climate and Health Advisory Board to ensure centralized administration and coordination of climate and health projects.
5. Hire additional Office of Health Equity staff to focus specifically on the intersection of environmental health and health equity.
6. Leverage resources and strengthen capacity to advance EJ and health equity by establishing or enhancing interagency program coordination and collaboration.

7. Develop data reporting rules to gather health equity and EJ-related variables in disease reporting system (PA-NEDSS).
8. Include health equity and EJ initiatives in the State Health Assessment, State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) and other state public health plans.
9. Adopt EJ and health equity-related performance measures and evaluation criteria to conduct plan and program quality improvement and to maintain accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB).

LEADER: Office of Health Equity, Bureau of Epidemiology, Office of Operational Excellence

SO THAT: All DOH programs include consideration for health needs of residents living in EJ areas and focus on health equity, environmental health, and climate, to the extent possible.

MEASURES/TARGETS:

- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of DOH capacity
- Boards established (Y/N)
- Number of board members
- Number of DOH bureaus and offices represented on the boards
- Number of DOH bureaus and offices with program-specific EJ plans
- Rules developed for data reporting (Y/N)
- Number and percent of reports with race and ethnicity data
- Number of performance measures adopted

Strategy 3: Integrate EJ and Health Equity Principles into Grant and Contract Processes

TO: Increase equity of DOH's grant and contracting processes.

FOR Grant applicants, grant recipients, Pennsylvania residents living in EJ areas

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

1. Revise the internal grant approval process document to include information on the proposed program's impact on health equity and focus on EJ areas.
2. Explore method of prioritization for organizations addressing health equity and EJ efforts in the contract approval process.
3. Work with other state agencies to assess ability of EJ communities to obtain state grants and contracts and develop a plan to build capacity among communities.

LEADER: Policy Office; Office of Procurement

SO THAT: DOH funding prioritizes efforts to address EJ and health equity and focus on communities disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards, where possible.

MEASURES/TARGETS:

- Revised grant walk-through document (Y/N)
- Amount of grant funding benefitting EJ communities
- Number of contracts awarded to organizations addressing health equity and EJ efforts and/or serving EJ communities, including minority-owned organizations

Strategy 4: Collaborate with State Agencies to Promote EJ and Health Equity

TO: Increase the impact of EJ and health equity initiatives through partnership with other state agencies

FOR: DOH staff, Pennsylvania residents

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

1. Participate as an active member in EJIC meetings and collaborative initiatives of the council.
2. Establish an interagency Health in All Policies work group to incorporate considerations for health across state agency initiatives. Activities may include health impact assessments, cross agency data sharing and policy development.
3. Establish regular meetings between DOH Office of Health Equity and DEP Office of Environmental Justice.
4. Collaborate with Pennsylvania Department of Education on health equity and EJ curriculum development.

LEADER: Office of Health Equity; Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology

SO THAT: Serve EJ communities more effectively and improve health equity and EJ literacy among Pennsylvania residents.

MEASURES/TARGETS:

- Number of EJIC meetings attended by DOH staff
- Number of health impact assessments completed
- Number of policies developed
- School curriculum developed (Y/N)
- Number of schools implementing curriculum
- Development of DOH and DEP meeting schedule
- Number of meetings held

Environmental Justice External Strategy

Strategy 1: Strengthen Engagement with EJ Communities

TO: Increase meaningful engagement with EJ communities and stakeholders, including communication to/from communities.

FOR: PA residents living in EJ communities

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

1. Increase two-way communication with the public, particularly with residents living in EJ communities.
2. Increase outreach initiatives with EJ communities and stakeholders working in those communities.
3. Include EJ community members in decision-making on climate change and public health.
4. Promote public health careers in EJ communities across the commonwealth.

LEADER: Office of Health Equity, Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology, Climate Change and Public Health Workgroup

SO THAT: DOH has a better understanding of issues, needs, and concerns of residents living in EJ communities to better serve all Pennsylvania residents.

MEASURES/TARGETS

- Number of public outreach events attended
- Number of job fairs attended in EJ communities
- Number of Climate Change and Public Health Workgroup meetings with EJ community members in attendance

References

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The Constitution of Pennsylvania. Art. I, § 27.

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