

Cancer Prevention Across the Lifespan: Environmental Health

**A Survey of Cancer Screening Program
Directors and Chronic Disease Directors**

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**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
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Purpose

This report is intended to summarize the findings of a survey conducted with Chronic Disease Directors and the Leadership Workgroup of the NACDD Cancer Council.

Background

CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control formed the Cancer Prevention Across the Lifespan (CPAL) workgroup in an effort to address cancer risk and protective factors at each phase of life.

The current project also encompasses interest in understanding how public health practitioners view environmental health including: toxin exposure and environmental health policy webinar topics, incorporation of environmental health into the state cancer plan, resources needed to focus on prevention of environmental risks, and preferred sources of information.

Summary Report

A twenty-eight question survey was developed using Qualtrics software and distributed to State Cancer Screening Program Directors and state Chronic Disease Directors in all fifty states and the District of Columbia (DC). The majority of the survey focused on questions about federal and state policies that impact cancer screening; six questions focused on how the state may have addressed environmental health in its state cancer plan. Each state and DC was limited to one survey response, necessitating collaboration of chronic disease programs and cancer programs across organizational units in cases where the cancer screening programs were not co-located.

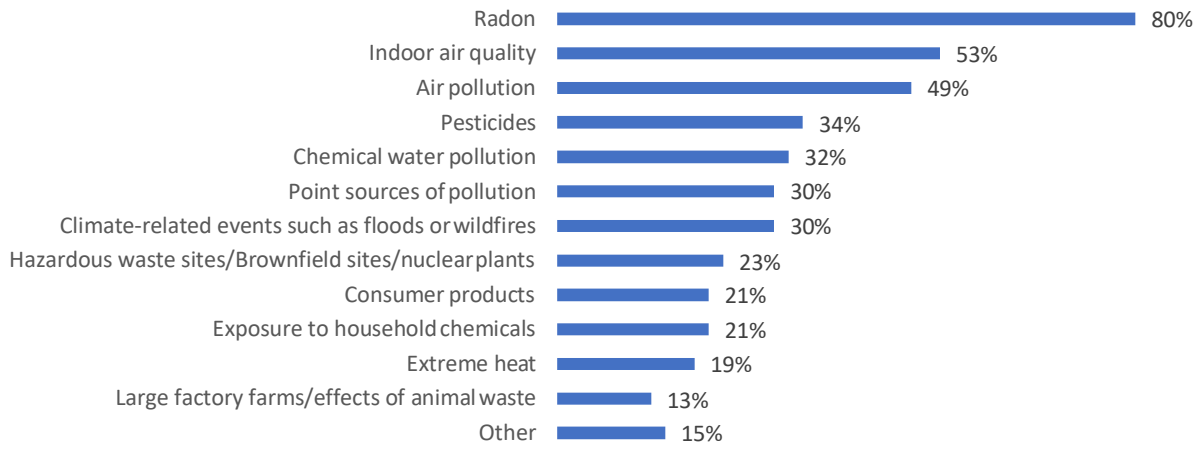
The survey was launched March 18, 2020, with responses due on April 15. A worldwide outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and subsequent interruption of state health department operations prompted the NACDD to extend the deadline for survey responses to June 1, 2020. We received 47 responses to the Environmental Health section of the survey, producing a 92% response rate: the remaining states declined to complete the survey due to staff turnover and/or continue operational disruptions.

Respondents indicated that radon, air pollution and indoor air quality were top three important environmental health topics.

The respondents were given a list of environmental health concern topics and asked to consider their importance in the context of exposure to toxins as it relates to healthy communities. The respondents were asked to select all topics that apply. As indicated in Figure 1, the top three topics selected were radon (80%), indoor air quality (53%), and air pollution (49%), followed by pesticides (34%). Chemical water pollution was in the fourth place with 32% of respondents selecting this topic. Additional topics suggested by the study participants included: sun exposure, asbestos, healthy foods and tobacco and second-hand smoke.

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Figure 1: Which, if any, of the following topics are important to you in the context of exposure to toxins as it relates to healthy communities? (Check all that apply) (N=47)



Ways to identify state key environmental problems emerged as the #1 topic of interest for an environmental health policy webinar.

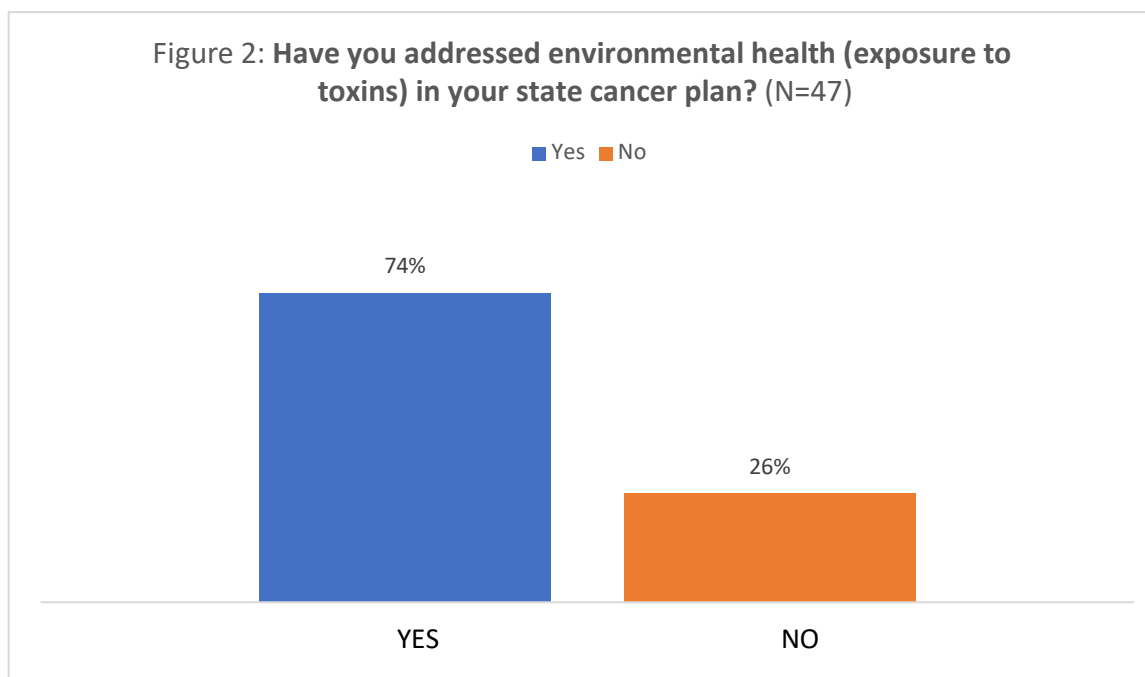
The respondents were given a list of five potential topics for an environmental health policy webinar and asked to rank order them with #1” being “most interesting” and #5 being “least interesting.” How to identify key environmental problems was ranked first, followed by how to plan to address a specific environmental risk factor and how to engage important partners and stakeholders in addressing environmental problems, Strengthening relationships with other units within the department of health and connecting with other areas of state government were the fourth and fifth most selected options.

The majority of the respondents indicated that their state cancer plan addresses environmental health.

When asked “Have you addressed environmental health (exposure to toxins) in your state cancer plan?” the overwhelming majority (74%) said “Yes” and 26% said “No” (See Figure 3). Among the reasons for not including environmental health in the state cancer plan “lack of capacity to implement recommendations” was cited by seven respondents. “Lack of data to identify priority topics” and “Not a priority for the cancer program” were cited four times each. “Lack of evidence-based interventions” and “Lack of administrative support” were cited three times each. Finally, “Not a priority for partners” was cited as a reason for not including environmental health in the state cancer plan by one participant.

Participants gave the following additional reasons for not including environmental health in the plan:

- “Our CDC program has been under-staffed in the past”
- “Lack of department of health infrastructure; no funding”
- “No state funding for Comp Cancer Program”
- “Group felt it was outside the scope of interest”
- “Environmental health was included in an iteration of our cancer plan that was never approved. We are currently working on the next iteration (2021-2025) of the plan, however, our advisory committee did not consider it a priority. In addition, we did not have stakeholder support to develop the content.”



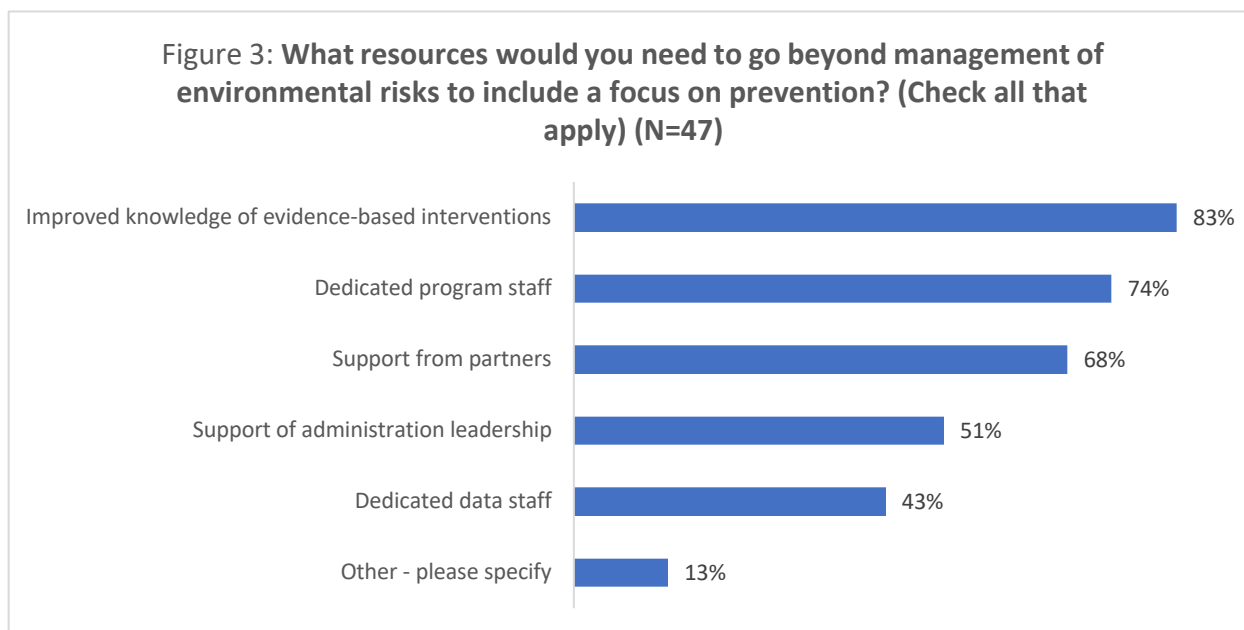
“Improved knowledge of evidence-based interventions” was the most-cited resource needed to include a focus on prevention of environmental risks.

Survey respondents were asked to identify resources they would need “to go beyond management of environmental risks to include a focus on prevention.” The top three most-needed resources were (See Figure 3 for details):

- Improved knowledge of evidence-based and/or promising practices for interventions, cited by 83% of respondents
- Dedicated program staff, cited by 74%

- Support from partners, cited by 68%

In the “Other” category, five individuals said that they needed funding and one individual said that they need “TA in best practices/models for partnerships/collaborations with various entities.”



Respondents ranked webinar as the most preferred way to receive information about changing health policy.

The respondents were asked to indicate their preferences for receiving information from NACDD on changing health policy by ranking the following modes of information delivery:

- High level one-page briefs with hyperlinks to original sources
- In-depth multi page review, referenced
- Webinar
- Conference call

As noted above, the webinar format was the most selected option, followed by a one-page brief. An in-depth multi-page document and a conference call were the third and fourth most selected options.

Next Steps

This report will be submitted to the CDC Division of Cancer Prevention and Control to guide future environmental health topic selection.