

Women's Health and the Environment Initiative (WHEI)

The Women's Health and the Environment Conference, sponsored by Teresa Heinz, the Heinz Endowments and Magee-Womens Hospital and held in Pittsburgh on April 20, 2007 to honor the 100th anniversary of Rachel Carson's birth, provided a timely opportunity to bring together leaders working at the nexus of women's health and the environment. On the eve of the Conference, the Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) convened a strategy meeting to design the next steps in building the Women's Health and the Environment Initiative (WHEI).

The vision of WHEI is to create a world in which women: 1) are better protected from environmental threats to their health; 2) live in environments that are healthier for them, their families and their community; and 3) feel empowered to advocate for protections at the individual, community and societal levels. The purpose of the meeting was to create a network among leaders in the women's health and environment field with the goal of empowering a broader swath of women on these vital issues.

The meeting garnered a phenomenal positive response with over 70 people in the room representing a wide base of leadership in the field and producing several hopeful outcomes. The group:

- began to build a network of leaders working at the nexus of women's health and the environment;
- identified messages and approaches for how women are currently being reached on these issues and discussed ways to streamline our messages and/or tailor our messages for specific target audiences of women;
- crafted a set of projects that warrant network collaborations and that are intended to reach our goal of reaching a broader swath of women;
- identified new tools for leaders to stay connected with each other and to improve the network given our day-to-day demands;
- discussed how we best structure this initiative and who else needs to be involved.

CHE will shepherd the WHEI effort until a more formal structure is collaboratively developed and agreed to by WHEI partners. WHEI partners agreed to help plan the next step of

informational and organizing conference calls around the areas of: a) structure of the initiative reflective of diverse leadership; b) network building, network tools, and outreach to the "blogosphere;" c) outreach tools for women in the general public; d) messaging, polling and media; e) policy agenda setting, civic engagement and voter education; and f) the nexus between reproductive justice and environmental health and justice. If you would like to be involved in WHEI, and join the WHEI listserv, please contact Susan West Marmagas at: susan@healthandenvironment.org. In addition, the Conference saw the release of CHE's new Women's Health and the Environment toolkit and website, described below...

The Health & Environmental Funders Network (HEFN) has established a working group on Women, Health and the Environment which brings together funders working at the intersection of women's health and the environment. If you are a funder interested in women's health and the environment, please contact Karla Fortunato at kfortunato@hefn.org.

New Women's Health and the Environment Website and Toolkit

The new Women's Health and the Environment website, at: www.womenshealthandenvironment.org, contains information about the science linking women's health and the environment and ideas for individual, community, state and national-level advocacy aimed at reducing human exposures to contaminants.

A toolkit has also been developed that anyone can download and share for free (see: www.womenshealthandenvironment.org/toolkit). Both the website and toolkit were built based on materials and wisdom from leaders and organizations working at the nexus of women's health and the environment.