

Report 97: Environmental Health Communication Research

Convener: Liam O'Fallon

Brief History: NIEHS has a long history of supporting projects that communicate environmental health information, but has not engaged in communication research (the science of communicating science). In addition, the theme of communication has been reflected throughout the meeting. Reports 6, 22, 37, 41, 43, and 49 have all recommended that communication be a part of the NIEHS research culture. Communication research could help to improve this work by providing insights on how audiences understand and act upon environmental health messages.

Discussion Highlights:

Partnerships are essential: Behavioral and Social Science Researchers, Sociologists/anthropologists, Schools of Journalism, Other federal partners (NCI, CDC, EPA, NASA, etc), risk communication programs, Marketing organizations.

Gap in environmental health (EH) Communication Research – where information exists, it tends to be outdated. There is plenty of basic communication research information, but not specifically focused on EH topics. Need to provide EH content to inform communication research work.

Need: Disseminating research for prevention and public health is central to the NIEHS mission, EH Communication Research will enhance and inform this part of the mission. It will improve the effectiveness of EH messages, inform better/tailored messages, could be used as part of communication intervention/prevention strategies.

Communication research is part of *primary* prevention strategy.

Key to communication success:

- Trusting relationships (CBPR), communication strategies need to be developed up front.
- Partnerships with advocacy groups to get messages out
- Cultural understanding

Challenge:

- Information overload – communication research can help in understanding of how to tailor and target messages to reduce information overload.
- Organizational challenges – study sections will likely require education of communication research

Communication research can help to move EH communication forward light years. Simple and complex approaches

Simple = focus groups – How do people interpret messages? Understanding of EH?
Precautionary principle? **Prevention? ** What is the public really interested in??
Complex = hire in outside consultants, imaging (more \$\$)

There needs to be a process to get people to use information. How do you make it useful? People have their own ways to make info useful. Role of US Gov't is to provide research in 'Plain Language' for public use. In context. Communication research can help to address these issues.

Communication research can show impacts better.

Recommendations:

Increase resources to support communication of research – must ensure community/stakeholder engagement in process of identifying issues.

Build off past NIEHS investments – communication research strategies should use existing frameworks as foundation, leverage existing partnerships

Communication research should be a part of the whole institute

EHP should have a dedicated section on communication science

Convene a workshop of experts in communication research to identify research questions and then act upon those recommendations... develop an FOA.

Discussion Participants:

Brody, Claudio, Edwards, Froines, Haynes, Kostant, Madrigal, McConnell, O'Fallon, Rizzo, Sen