

**Pollution, Toxic Chemicals and Mental Retardation
A National Summit**

July 22-24, 2003

Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin

An Initiative Of

The American Association on Mental Retardation

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**The Arc of the United States Research Fund
The Association of University Centers on Disabilities**

Need for the Summit

The evidence is mounting that exposure to environmental pollutants and toxins is contributing to poorer health and significant increases in chronic disease and disabilities in our society. According to the Collaboration on Human Health and The Environment, the resulting health problems are having a staggering impact on the cost of health care and losses in workforce productivity in excess of \$325 billion annually. Not only is the economic impact indeed significant, the human cost for families and communities is tragic, immeasurable, and of deep concern to the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR). AAMR is all too aware of the human and economic costs that parents, families and entire communities face when a child is born with mental retardation. Each and every day, families struggle for assistance, direction and support as they attempt to meet the needs of their child with this significant disability. At the same time, cost data issued by disability expert David Braddock also show that public spending for mental retardation and developmental disabilities (MRDD) services is rapidly increasing. Today more than \$30 billion is spent annually with the average daily cost of residential service and other supports ranging from a low of \$230 per day in Arkansas, Indiana, Nebraska and Texas to more than \$500 per day in Connecticut, Idaho, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Tennessee. Mental retardation is indeed costly in human and economic terms and while AAMR firmly believes that dignity, service and support must be afforded to every individual who has this disability in our society, we also strongly support preventing unnecessary disabilities from occurring in the first place.

Unfortunately, in recent years, disability prevention and health promotion activities have not been a high priority among the national mental retardation associations and organizations. More attention has been given to improving the quality of community service programs, supporting the growth of the self-advocacy movement, and eliminating long waiting lists for adult services. Although these issues are important, in view of the intensifying societal interest in environmental issues, increasing scientific knowledge, the growing sophistication and advocacy strength of the broader health and environment community network, and the increasing awareness about how to educate people about preventing unnecessary disabilities from occurring, the time is right to reenergize the mental retardation network. Organizations concerned about mental retardation must put disability prevention and health promotion back on their priority agenda. With a long and distinguished 127 year history that includes international credibility in research, education, and policy, coupled with a membership comprised of national health and disability leaders, AAMR is privileged to be given an opportunity to convene an intensive, invitational Action Planning Summit on pollutants, toxins and their effect on mental retardation.

Summit Purpose and Objectives

The goal of the Wingspread Summit was to bring the developmental disabilities network together with the environmental health network to develop a National Blueprint for Health Promotion and Disability Prevention that contributes to the broader national effort aimed at

reducing the unnecessary occurrence of disabilities due to avoidable exposure to pollutants and toxins.

Questions addressed at the Summit include:

- What do we know about toxins that affect brain development such as lead, mercury, alcohol, nicotine, pesticides, PCB's, solvents, etc?
- What is known about the relationship between these toxins and the occurrence of mental retardation and related developmental disabilities?
- What can be done to prevent the unnecessary causes of mental retardation and related developmental disabilities?
- What is the impact of environmental toxins on the functional abilities of people in our society including those who are living with mental retardation?
- What innovative efforts are currently being taken across the country in the areas of research, service and public policy?
- What specific action steps can be taken by the national MRDD organizations to educate and mobilize our constituencies in support of the National Blueprint to prevent the unnecessary occurrence of disabilities?
- How can we deliver a compelling health promotion and disability prevention message to our constituency?

The specific objectives of the Summit include:

- To establish collaborative relationships between the environmental health community and the mental retardation disability network by identifying issues of mutual concern and areas for collaborative action.
- To provide accurate research data that will provide a common framework for the collaborating partners including the current state-of-the-art in scientific research, innovative health education and prevention efforts, and cutting edge state and national policy initiatives.
- To create a vision that will guide development of a National Blueprint on Health Promotion and Disability Prevention for the mental retardation network.
- To develop a Broad Consensus Statement that the MRDD groups can endorse.

- To frame a National Blueprint for the disability organizations that will:
 - Articulate important research findings.
 - Identify areas where future research can be supported.
 - Highlight innovative service initiatives.
 - Recommend state and national policy directions.
 - Develop a common message for health promotion and disability prevention.
 - Articulate communication strategies for participating stakeholders.
 - Identify an expanded network of partners.
 - Articulate next steps in implementing the National Blueprint.

Summit Outcomes

AAMR will publish a report on the Wingspread summit later this year.

Summit Participants

Wingspread participants are listed in alphabetical order by last name below:

Ansley Bacon, Ph.D.
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Valhalla, NY

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President & CEO
Ray Graham Association for Individuals with Disabilities
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David Wallinga, MD, MPH
Antibiotic Resistance Project Director
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Papers presented at the Wingspread Summit

Potential Environmental Contributors to Developmental Disabilities: Why We Should Care. By Elise Miller, Institute for Children's Environmental Health.

Mental Retardation and Related Developmental Disabilities Perspective: Inside Looking Out. By Sheryl White-Scott, St. Charles Developmental Disabilities Program.

Windows of Vulnerability and Susceptibility to Environmental Contaminants: Mental Retardation and Exposure to Neurodevelopmental Toxicants. By Ted Schettler, Science Environmental Health Network.

Methylmercury: A Story of Fishes and Loaves. By Philip W. Davidson, University of Rochester Medical Center.

What's the Contribution of Environmental Factors in the Etiology of Mental Retardation? By Coleen Boyle, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Arsenic and Old Lead: Our Homes, Our Food, Our Day Care Centers, Schools, Work, and Leisure. By Deborah E. Cohen, Office for Prevention of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, State of New Jersey.

Facilities for Education: Learning the Harder Way. By Claire L. Barnett, Healthy Schools Network.

The Emperor's Clothes: Why Chemicals Aren't Tested for Their Impacts on the Developing Brain...Why Is This Important? By David Wallinga, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Failure to Protect: Why Current Laws Don't Protect Against Chemical Exposures...Directions for Reform. By Jeremiah Baumann, State Public Interest Research Groups.

Summit Sponsors

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