

Update from the American Public Health Association Meeting

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From left to right: David-Martin Milot (PGY4, Université de Sherbrooke); Mathieu Lanthier-Veilleux (PGY4, Université de Sherbrooke); Catherine Habel (PGY3, University of Montreal); Andréanne Roy (PGY5, Université de Sherbrooke); Imane Cheriet (PGY4, University of Montreal)

The American Public Health Association's (APHA) 143rd Annual Meeting and Exposition took place at the beginning of November in Chicago. This year's conference, which theme was *Health in All Policies*, brought together more than 12,000 public health professionals from all around the world. Here are some hot topics that were discussed during the conference, presented by three public health and preventive medicine residents.

Health and Climate Change: a Priority in Public Health

Right from the beginning of the conference, the necessity to consider climate change as a public health issue was highlighted by Ed Begley Jr., a renowned environmentalist. This theme was then explored by numerous panelists throughout the conference. An expert proposed a framework to structure the actions made for the benefit of the environment: 1) Bring organizational or structural changes to the institutions; 2) Support individuals in the development of their environmental awareness based on evidence; 3) Change the narrative in a way that is favorable to the environment.

Water Fluoridation: Threatened in the USA

In 2015, the United States of America are celebrating the 70th anniversary of water fluoridation in the country. Being one of the top 10 best public health interventions of the 20th century in the USA, water fluoridation has a return on investment of US\$38 per dollar invested. Despite the abundant quantity of evidence on this intervention, some opposing groups have organized themselves and become a serious preoccupation for US public health authorities. For example, the most popular anti-fluoridation websites are now visited 5 to 60 times more often than their pro-fluoridation counterparts in the country.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership: Any Concerns for Public Health?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is the most important commercial agreement ever proposed. It is now the object of negotiations. The main aspect of the TPP covered at the APHA was the protection of public health standards, which could be compromised by laws enforcing free trade. In that sense, the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) may represent a threat. This institution allows enterprises to bypass their countries' own justice systems to have their commercial concerns heard. Some cases such as the one highly advertised of Cochabamba, where the cancellation of a water privatization contract could have led to

disastrous financial consequences in Bolivia, could become much more common. The right to drinkable water, alimentation, intellectual property and generic medicines are some examples of what could be targeted by the ISDS. This is why the USA and Australia requested special clauses to this process, with regards to tobacco. Negotiators have already claimed that the general clauses of the ISDS seem insufficient to protect the standards of public health gained over the past decades.

Mobilizing for Action with the MAPP Tool

Mobilizing for action through planning and partnerships (MAPP): This is the challenge that MAPP tool users want to tackle. It allows for the organization of planning efforts in a way that considers a common goal of social justice. The tool requires doing a community assessment, which gives rise to a reflection on what may bring about positive change. Through focus groups, the stakeholders are invited to share their thoughts on three important aspects:

- What are the important problems, opportunities and threats in the community?
- Who is affected by them and how?
- What are the strengths in place to build on (institutions, particular interests, groups in a position of power)?

This reflection on the power of change ensures that the community assessment process considers equity issues and the distribution of strengths within the community members. Through the participation of the stakeholders, it allows to redistribute this power and to share the responsibilities in facing the public health challenges. For more information, please visit: <http://www.naccho.org/mapp>

A few tips on communications and advocacy

Researcher, journalist and legislator panelists shared some tips on how to better sell our public health messages and ideas. The main advice was to know your target population well: its perspective, its interests and its ability to understand. As one parent out of three has health literacy issues, it is important to simplify as much as

possible our messages to be understood. Humans being emotive beings, a message that is more humane increases its chances to be shared and considered by your target population: adding a face, a personal story or even a picture of an animal or a baby are strategies that have proven successful by the experienced panelists. Finally, stay connected with the media in your region and with the social media to develop strong collaborative relationships with the journalists and to be able to disseminate your messages in a timely fashion.