

# VITAL SIGNS

Perspectives of the president of APHA

## Connecting the dots: Human health, animal health and the environment

**A**S WE celebrate National Public Health Week this month, we need to expand our thinking and explore how changes in our environment and climate affect not only human health, but also animal health, which has direct connections to the health of the public.

Climate change, the focal point of National Public Health Week 2008, provides us with many opportunities to add new partners to our networks and to broaden our vision. It also helps increase the impact of our work by leveraging the efforts of traditional public health practice and nontraditional partners whose expertise enhances our knowledge.

During my visit to the Alaska Public Health Summit in December, I heard an Arctic explorer speak about his travels and the changes that he has observed in the Arctic zones over many years of “mushing” across frozen landscapes. Feeding grounds for polar bears are changing. As the ice floes dissipate, there are fewer seals close to shore for polar bears to feed on, forcing the bears to swim long distances and become exhausted before they can return to safety.

Humans have changed the planet's climate, destroying habitats, changing the course of rivers, making deserts green and introducing non-native species that threaten native plants and animals. Industrialization, while benefiting society, has also resulted in harm to the environment, and we are slow in finding solutions to mitigate these harms and their impact on vulnerable populations. Seemingly small changes in temperature affect habitats and thereby affect the food chain, impacting places that have contributed the least to global warming and leading to decreased access to food and water supplies.

We tend to forget that animal health is closely

related to public health. Diseases and environmental changes that affect humans also affect animals, and, in turn, have an effect on human populations. We also forget that human actions affect the food chain, the distribution of insect populations and the ability for marine life to survive as water temperatures and levels change. We don't even notice the impact of rising water levels on small inhabited islands, such as the flooding of crops and loss of food sources.

We need to change this. We need to get beyond our comfort zone and explore partnerships with groups that are committed to protecting the environment, protecting animal species and exploring the linkage between humans and animals and the health of our world. We need to embrace and explore the concept of “one health” — a concept that calls for more collaboration between those who work to improve human health and those who focus on animal health.

Let's see if we can grow this partnership and include our professional peers who work with other living populations. Let's make the linkage between the health of our climate and the health of all living things on our planet. ■

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## Send us your National Public Health Week news, photos

**A**S YOU hold your National Public Health Week events this month, be sure to keep *The Nation's Health* in mind.

In an upcoming issue, *The Nation's Health* will feature coverage of events held around the nation, and your community event could be one of them.

Send us a short summary of your activities, when it was held, who was involved and what was accomplished. National Public Health Week photos and artwork are also welcome. If possible, digital photos should be at a resolution of at least 300 dpi and should be e-mailed as separate JPEG attachments. Printed photos may be mailed. Please note if a photo credit should be given.

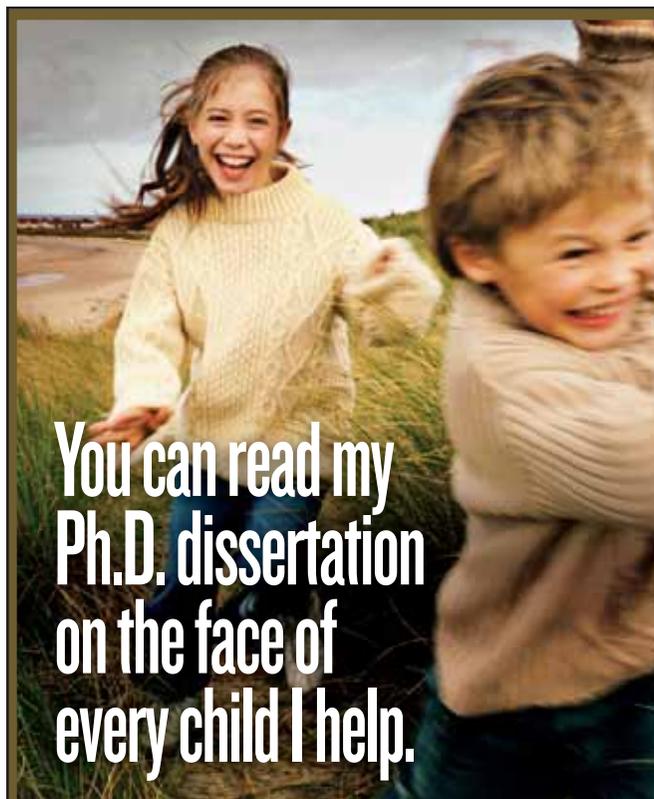
“This is your chance to share your ideas and experiences with public health colleagues from around the country,” said Michele Late, the newspaper's executive editor. “Everyone who sends us information will be mentioned. We would love to showcase your work.”

Information should be e-mailed by April 25 to [nations.health@apha.org](mailto:nations.health@apha.org) or mailed to: Editor, *The Nation's Health*, 800 I St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-3710. Everyone who sends their information via e-mail will receive a submission confirmation.

*The Nation's Health* will send extra copies of the issue to participants who send in their news, so be sure to include your mailing address and the name of a contact person.

National Public Health Week 2008, which will be observed April 7–13, has a theme of “Climate Change: Our Health in the Balance.” For information on National Public Health Week, visit [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org) or e-mail [nphw@apha.org](mailto:nphw@apha.org).

For more information on submitting your National Public Health Week news to *The Nation's Health*, call (202) 777-2488 or e-mail [nations.health@apha.org](mailto:nations.health@apha.org). ■



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