

## **Self Advocates Get Involved in Environmental Health!**

**Presenters:** Laura Abulafia, MHS (lead presenter); Joe Meadours

**Intended audience:** Community members

### **Session Description**

Learning and developmental disabilities (LDDs ) affect approximately one in six children in the U.S. and appear to be increasing. Though there are many factors that contribute to children's development such as genetics and social environment, environmental toxicants are one of the least researched and most preventable of factors. It is well documented that exposures to lead, mercury and PCBs during critical windows of neurodevelopment can contribute to LDDs.

Not only can toxic chemicals cause disabilities, but they can also impact the health of people living with disabilities. Health is one of AAIDD's cornerstones, and the Environmental Health Initiative aims to bring the self advocacy community into the dialogue around toxic chemicals in our environments. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemical exposures for many reasons, and may be more unable to cope with these exposures immunologically. Special considerations of the DD community need to be examined such as abnormal metabolism function of people with Downs syndrome and what that means for how they handle toxicants. Another special consideration would be pica activity that may predispose exposure to contaminants on non-food items such as lead contaminated soil or paint chips. We must act together to prevent unnecessary secondary health problems that can impact this vulnerable community.

This presentation will discuss the current state of scientific evidence with regard to neurotoxic exposures and LDDs. A framework will be presented to further discuss the notion of environmental justice issues within the LDD community and possible differential risks to toxic exposures for the disability community. Finally, an overview will be provided of national and regional efforts to increase research in the field, promote policy and legislative issues that protect the health of people with special vulnerabilities, and educational activities that are protective of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Goals:

- 1) Participants will understand the nature and extent of developmental disabilities in the United States.

2) Participants will learn about the special considerations and health effects of people with developmental disabilities regarding pollution and toxic exposures that occur in the home, in schools, and in the community.

3) Participants will learn about how developmental disabilities organizations can work together with key environmental health allies to reduce exposures to neurotoxicants for our most vulnerable communities.

4) Participants will be able to identify specific legislative and policy priorities, such as Chemical Policy Reform, for the developmental disabilities community in regards to neurotoxicants in commerce.