

Forum explores environmental impacts on women's health

By Eddy Ball

NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., was the featured speaker at a forum July 28 at the Dobbs Ferry campus of Mercy College in Westchester County, New York. [Mercy College](https://www.mercy.edu/about-mercy-college/mercy-profile/), (<https://www.mercy.edu/about-mercy-college/mercy-profile/>) founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1950 to educate members of the order, began in the 1960s to evolve into a non-sectarian coeducational institution with strong programs in the health sciences.

The forum, "Silent Dangers: Environmental Impacts on Women's Health," helped raise awareness of environmental influences on public health and the importance of biomedical research in developing effective preventive initiatives.

Linked Audio

[Listen to WAMC Northeast Public Radio reporter Allison Dunne's report on the forum with interviews of Birnbaum and Lowey \(03:51\)](#)

Key messages about public health and biomedical research

"Gaining a better understanding of how the environment affects our health will lead to healthier lives," Birnbaum told the audience. "NIEHS' work is centered around important environmental health research, focusing on prevention as opposed to expensive treatment."

"Investments in environmental health research lead to lower health care costs, greater economic growth, and improved quality of life," said U.S. Representative Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., who also spoke at the forum. "I've seen, firsthand, NIH's impact on improving health."

Women with a commitment

Birnbaum has led the world's premier environmental sciences research organization and the leading public health institute at NIH since 2009. Lowey, who has represented New York's 17th congressional district since 1988, has taken a leadership role in such areas as equal opportunity and biomedical research. Both are firsts in their fields.

Birnbaum is the first woman and first toxicologist to serve as director of NIEHS and NTP, as well as the first director to have served as a lead researcher for both NIEHS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Lowey is the first woman and the first New Yorker to chair the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, as well as the first woman to lead either party on the powerful U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, also known as the House Appropriations Committee.

(This story was adapted from a July 28 [story](http://pleasantville.dailyvoice.com/news/lowey-highlights-environmental-impact-womens-health) (<http://pleasantville.dailyvoice.com/news/lowey-highlights-environmental-impact-womens-health>) by Danny LoPriore in the Pleasantville [New York] Daily Voice and a July 30 [report](http://wamc.org/post/womens-health-and-environment-was-forum-topic) (<http://wamc.org/post/womens-health-and-environment-was-forum-topic>) by Allison Dunne of WAMC Northeast Public Radio.)



"We know that at least two-thirds of cancer cases are, in part, caused by environmental factors," Birnbaum said. "If we know what it is in our environment that's impacting our health, we should be able to do something about it." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Lowey told attendees that biomedical research is not only essential for advancing public health, but also a stimulant for economic development. (Photo courtesy of Nita Lowey)

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