

04-11

STATEMENT OF POLICY

LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT EPIDEMIOLOGY AND SURVEILLANCE CAPACITIES

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the development of local health department (LHD) epidemiology and surveillance capacities to promote and improve evidence-based public health practice at the local health department level.

NACCHO strongly supports the development of integrated surveillance systems and mechanisms to allow for collecting, analyzing and disseminating accurate local data, including but not limited to levels of census tract, zip code, county, city, and region. Data files should reside in electronic form at the LHD whenever local capacity permits and be designed to permit analysis of data elements by local staff to address local circumstances. In addition, NACCHO urges that local- and state-reported data in such systems be equally accessible to local, state, and federal jurisdictions and that LHDs have access to other locally-developed datasets.

Justification

Epidemiology and surveillance capacities include having, or having access to, sufficient personnel and systems to: 1) recognize promptly and respond effectively to disease outbreaks and other public health issues; 2) monitor and analyze the incidence and prevalence of diseases and or conditions of public health significance; 3) provide LHDs, and others with a need to know, with accurate and timely data to ensure sufficient resource allocation to areas of greatest need; and 4) evaluate the effectiveness of programs and interventions.

Epidemiology and surveillance capacities are essential to assuring the three core functions of public health at the local level: assessment, policy development, and assurance. The strategic assignment of epidemiology professionals to provide technical assistance and support to LHDs and the provision of epidemiologic training to LHD staff will enable the setting of appropriate population-based health metrics, ongoing improvement of public health response protocols and interventions, and improvement of community health outcomes.

Finally, national and state datasets often do not have specific local data, which limits their usefulness to LHDs. Data that can be disaggregated by census tract, zip code, county, city, and/or region are integral to developing and implementing data-driven public health programs, interventions, and priorities.¹

Record of Action

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors, November 7, 2004

Updated July 11, 2007

Updated October 2010



¹ Luck J., Chang C, Brown EC and John Lumpkin J. Using local health information to promote public health: issues, barriers, and proposed solutions to improve information flow. *Health Affairs*. 2006;25:975-991.