

NACCHO STATEMENT OF POLICY

Environmental Public Health Tracking

Policy

Environmental public health tracking involves the ongoing and systematic collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data from environmental hazard monitoring, human exposure surveillance, and health effects surveillance.

- NACCHO advocates for local public health department involvement in planning, development, and implementation activities of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (e.g., state-funded grantees to collaborate with their local counterparts) to ensure the utility of the tracking network to local jurisdictions.
- NACCHO advocates for local health departments' (LHDs)' active involvement in the definition of data and functional requirements for tracking and surveillance systems as data providers and users of such systems. State and federal public health agencies must ensure that LHDs have timely access to any data collected about their local community.
- NACCHO advocates for public health policies and surveillance methods to address social injustices that contribute to the disproportionate burden of environmentally-related illnesses and conditions that generate inequity in the distribution of disease among underrepresented, low-income, and socially disadvantaged populations. Such support means monitoring the sources of environmental burdens in the communities of those populations, including new and innovative strategies to identify sources of data typically not captured in traditional surveillance systems. In addition, communities must be involved in the development of tracking systems in order to set priorities and determine appropriate indicators.
- NACCHO advocates for LHDs to have near real-time and direct access to data collected in their jurisdictions to ensure timely and appropriate response to community concerns and inquiries, as implementation plans for statewide and nationwide activities are launched. In addition, existing legal barriers to local access to data in some state statutes should be minimized or removed.
- NACCHO advocates for the enhancement of local public health resources and infrastructure to ensure LHDs can create, access, and use data. Sufficient information technology resources are necessary to receive and analyze data and these capabilities should be enhanced and made available for many LHDs that

lack current capacity. Sufficient well-trained staff must be available to analyze, interpret and disseminate data.

Justification

Environmentally related illnesses take a great human toll and such conditions are on the rise. Combined with significant gaps in environmental surveillance and exposure data linked to health outcomes, there is a need for coordinating and standardizing the integration, analysis, and dissemination of such information. Local health departments are the traditional entry point for routine disease surveillance and investigation, and function as first responders in a public health emergency. As such, they are keenly aware of the information needed to monitor for public health emergencies and mount response and mitigation activities.

Using information from the tracking network, local, state, and federal agencies will be better prepared to develop and evaluate effective public health actions to prevent or control chronic and acute diseases that can be linked to environmental hazards. In addition, the public will be better prepared to consider actions they may take or policies to advocate for protecting and improving their health. Overall, EPHT will create an improved organizational and technical environment for collecting, managing, exchanging, and using information about a wide array of environmental public health issues and concerns. Environmental health includes issues beyond contaminants and hazards, such as the contextual characteristics of place, e.g. housing conditions, access to mass transportation, racial segregation, and land use and zoning regulations.

On a local level, these benefits can manifest in any number of specific environmental health innovations. The network will make accessible data sets to examine local level geographic and temporal trends around health outcomes. The analysis of such data sets will improve the ability of LHDs to respond to outbreaks, disease clusters, and emerging health threats. Whether tracking the prevalence of asthma, increasing rates of birth defects, or linkages between toxic waste location and cancer clusters, the EPHT network will offer LHDs unprecedented data sets necessary to improving the effectiveness of environmental health interventions.

Record of Action

Proposed by Environmental Health Advisory and Prevention Committee

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors

November 7, 2004

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