

05-08

STATEMENT OF POLICY Education and Recruitment of Public Health Nurses

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recognizes the nationwide nursing shortage as an important challenge facing local health departments (LHDs).

NACCHO supports:

- Increased federal funding to programs encouraging minorities and persons from underserved areas to enter into the health and nursing professions;
- Reducing the debt burden for underrepresented individuals through loan forgiveness programs and tuition reimbursement strategies;
- Enhancing scholarship and loan repayment program to help eliminate the public health workforce shortage.
- Increased federal funding for health professions training programs such as the National Health Service Corps and Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act;
- Integrating public health nursing rotations into nursing school curricula;
- Creating programs to encourage school-aged children to enter public health nursing careers and support for students as they progress through college and nursing school;
- The Health Resources and Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state health departments, and universities increasing the availability of supplemental education for public health nurses as a means of retaining and strengthening the LHD workforce, through mechanisms such as online training, webcasts, and scholarships;
- Increased access to online training and degree programs; and
- Parity in salaries for public health nurses and nurses in clinical practice.

NACCHO encourages LHDs to:

- Provide nursing internship opportunities;
- Increase public health training opportunities for nursing professionals while augmenting nursing shortages across the nation; and
- Increase the availability of supplemental education for public health nurses as a means of retaining and strengthening the LHD workforce.



NACCHO will seek partnerships with LHDs and nursing organizations in order to enhance the visibility of public health nursing and enhance public health nursing educational opportunities for practicing nurses and students.

Justification

Public health nurses focus on the health of populations and working with communities and the individuals and families who live in them. With an emphasis on prevention, their practice is multi-faceted and has resulted in positive health outcomes including enhanced surveillance; higher rates of breastfeeding; reductions in pre-term births, low birth weight rates and improved behavior; education; and employment.¹ Public health nurses employ practices grounded in social justice, driven by epidemiological evidence, and involving community collaboration.²

The current shortage in public health nurses is partially the result of an overall shortage of registered nurses in addition to specific public health factors: an aging population of nurses, poorly funded public health system, and reduced or eliminated public health nursing positions.¹ In a 2000 study, only 1.8 percent of registered nurses were primarily employed in county or city health departments.³ African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Hawaiian Islanders, and other non-whites comprise approximately 25 percent⁴ of the U.S. population but only 12 percent of the nation's registered nurses.⁵ A direct link exists between poor health outcomes for minorities and the shortage of minority healthcare providers.⁶

The national shortage of public health nurses will become more acute, regardless of distribution or education preparation.⁷ Public health nurses are the largest component of the public health workforce making up 10 percent of the professional workforce and employed at 95 percent of local health departments.⁸ Fifty-nine percent of those LHDs report problems in hiring public health nurses.⁹ The most common reasons cited for difficulty in hiring include uncompetitive pay and benefits (91%), difficulty in attracting candidates to geographic area (45%), budgetary restrictions (39%), and insufficient experience (26%). The primary reasons for LHDs anticipating shortages are staff retirements and staff attrition (both over 60%).¹⁰

Proposed by Community Health and Prevention Committee

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors

May 17, 2005

Updated March 11, 2009

References

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² Minnesota Department of Health Center for Public Health Nursing. (2004). Cornerstones of Public Health Nursing. Retrieved February 4, 2009 from http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/cfh/ophp/resources/docs/cornerstones_definition_revised2007.pdf.

³ Spratley, E., Johnson, A., Sochalski, J., Fritz, M., Spencer, W. (2000). *The Registered Nurse Population: Findings from the National Sample Survey Of Registered Nurses*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing. Retrieved February 4, 2009 from <ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bhpr/rnsurvey2000/rnsurvey00.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). Race Alone or in Combination: 2000. Retrieved February 4, 2009 from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-gr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_QTP5&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U.

⁵ Minority Nursing Statistics. (2001-2008). Retrieved February 4, 2009 from <http://www.minoritynurse.com/statistics.html>.

⁶ Institute of Medicine of the National Academies.(2002). *Unequal Treatment: What HealthCare Providers Need to Know about Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare*. Washington D.C. The National Academies Press.

⁷ Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations. (2001). The Impact of the Nursing Shortage on Public Health Nursing. Retrieved February 4, 2009 from http://www.astdn.org/publication_impact_nursing_shortage.htm.

⁸ American Public Health Association. (2006) The Public Health Workforce Shortage: Left Unchecked, Will We Be Protected? Retrieved February 27, 2009 from http://sph.ucdavis.edu/documents/APHA_issuebrief_sept2006.pdf

⁹ NACCHO. (2007). The Local Health Department Workforce: Findings From the 2005 National Profile of Local Health Departments Study. Retrieved February 4, 2009 from http://www.naccho.org/topics/workforce/upload/LHD_WorkforceFinal.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid.