

07-09

## STATEMENT OF POLICY Local Health Department Role in Addressing Climate Change

### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) strongly urges national, state and local health departments (LHDs) and related agencies to engage policymakers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, communities and their own staff to prepare for and respond to climate change to reduce the severity of climate change-related health impacts.

Adaptation: LHDs, in partnership with state and federal public health agencies, must immediately prepare for climate changes impacting public health. NACCHO urges the public health community to provide strong leadership for necessary climate change adaptation efforts. This includes preparing communities for extreme environmental events that accompany climate change and coordinating with local governments on all-hazards disaster planning.

Mitigation: NACCHO supports strong and immediate international, federal, state, and local action to mitigate climate change. NACCHO urges the public health community to promote and participate in climate change mitigation efforts, including efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by energy production and use, land use, housing, and transportation.

NACCHO supports local public health activities to address climate change, including the following:

- Instituting strong, continuous, science-based, and culturally competent education programs to inform policymakers, communities, and LHD staff on the health impacts of climate change and on issues and opportunities regarding mitigation of climate change and adaptation to climate change.
- Developing local climate change mitigation plans and adaptation plans that address the health impacts of climate change.
- Participating in scientifically-based research programs related to climate change that readily translate to the practice of public health.
- Supporting research on emerging health impacts related to climate change and public health best practice standards.
- Conducting ongoing health monitoring of climate change impacts on local communities, including conducting vulnerability assessments and environmental studies and using the best available tools (e.g., geographic information system mapping) and sciences (e.g., ecology, climatology, geography) to better understand the impacts of climate change on public health. Particular attention must be given to the most vulnerable populations.
- Advocating for policies, plans, programs, and resources to support climate change mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation and adaptation activities should be health-based, science-based, equitable, and sustainable.



- Building partnerships with key local stakeholders to engage and enlist them in the response to climate change.
- Providing opportunities to educate and train public health leadership and the public health workforce to assure the capacity of LHDs to respond to the health effects of climate change.
- Using environmental health regulatory activities and authorities to protect the public's health from climate change.

### **Justification**

Overwhelming scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change exists.<sup>1</sup> Climate change has serious and far-reaching health implications for present and future generations.<sup>2</sup> For example, climate change is already changing the distribution of some infectious disease vectors and threatens to “increase the number of people suffering from death, disease and injury from heatwaves, floods, storms, fires and droughts.”<sup>3</sup> Climate change may also cause social disruption, economic decline, and displacement of populations, all of which may impact health substantially.<sup>4</sup> Climate change will disproportionately burden some—the very young and the elderly, the physically and mentally disabled, the poor and economically disadvantaged, and other marginalized communities.<sup>5</sup> Climate change can also exacerbate problems of social and environmental justice.

In order to reduce the negative health impacts of climate change, the local public health system must be prepared to address the present and future challenges from climate change. However, many LHDs are not adequately prepared to meet these challenges.<sup>6</sup> NACCHO recognizes that local health department capacity to engage climate change must be improved.

### **Record of Action**

*Adopted by the NACCHO Board of Directors, July 11, 2007*

*Updated November 2010*

### **References**

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5. Ebi, K.L., J. Balbus, P.L. Kinney, E. Lipp, D. Mills, M.S. O’Neill, and M. Wilson. Effects of Global Change on Human Health. *Synthesis and Assessment Product 4.6. Analyses of the Effects of Global Change on Human Health and Welfare and Human Systems*. Ed. J.L. Gamble. Washington, D.C.: Environmental Protection Agency. 2-22 to 2-26.
6. Environmental Defense Fund, National Association of County and City Health Officials, and George Mason University. *Are We Ready: Preparing for the Public Health Challenges of Climate Change*. Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from [www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/climatechange/upload/are-we-ready\\_14\\_view.pdf](http://www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/climatechange/upload/are-we-ready_14_view.pdf).