



**No. 07-06**

## **STATEMENT OF POLICY**

### **PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATICS WORKFORCE**

#### **Policy**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports training public health workers to become competent in public health informatics. Informatics is defined as the systematic application of information and computer science and technology to public health practice, research, and learning. NACCHO also supports recruitment and retention initiatives to obtain skilled professionals to improve the efficiency of public health information capacities and capitalize on the value of data collected to promote public health activities.

NACCHO encourages local health departments to collaborate with state, federal, academic and other public health entities to develop appropriate training courses that train a knowledgeable and skilled public health workforce, consistent with public health informatics competencies.<sup>1,2</sup>

NACCHO supports expanding and strengthening public health informatics training for future workforce capacity through accredited and non-accredited schools and programs of public health, competency-based continuing education programs, and distance learning. NACCHO also supports improving specialty training through degree and certificate programs, research and fellowship opportunities to better equip public health professionals with skills to perform public health informatics in practical settings.

#### **Justification**

Local public health professionals are increasingly relying on information technology and data systems to assess community health, provide preventive services, perform treatment and follow-up procedures, evaluate the effectiveness of preventive services and programs and identify resources for improving health initiatives within their communities. As public health issues become more complex, there is a need for the public health informatics workforce to be trained and competent in these emerging technologies to improve information gathering, analysis, and distribution.<sup>3</sup>

A recent survey assessing informatics training for the local health department workforce revealed that more than 60% of local health departments provided training in basic computer applications.<sup>4</sup> The study also noted that most local health department officials

felt that there was an important need to have their employees properly trained in public health informatics.<sup>5</sup> This is important because there is a demand for public health professionals to communicate information within programs, between the clinical sector, and across jurisdictional boundaries.<sup>6</sup>

Computer and communication infrastructure and systems have been slow to develop in local health departments, largely due to lack of financial resources to build and maintain these systems. This is a critical issue because information gathering is performed at the local level. Public health professionals need to have the training and expertise to effectively implement public health information systems.<sup>7</sup> Through many national initiatives, locals are working with state, private and other public health partners to institute public health information networks, Health Information Exchanges (HIEs), Regional Health Information Organizations (RHIOs), surveillance and other data-sharing efforts to assess community health, improve public health programs, link clinical information to private practitioners and partners, and renew preventive health care services.

The emergence of public health challenges in communities has raised awareness and demand of health professionals to be trained in public health informatics to better manage population health trends and monitor emerging infections. Government health authorities are partnering with academic and other research entities to develop professional competencies and provide trainings in the field. This is important for local public health professionals to have defined skill sets that are tailored to meet different needs of today's public health informatics professionals. Trainings range from general information about public health informatics to specialized skills on knowledge management for managers, decision makers and high level health officials.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O'Carroll, Patrick W et al. "Informatics Competencies for Public Health Professionals." Northwest Center for Public Health Practice University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine August 2002. Available at [http://nwcphp.org/docs/phi/comps/phic\\_web.pdf](http://nwcphp.org/docs/phi/comps/phic_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Karrass, Bryant T. et al. "Competencies for the Public Health Informatician Draft Competencies – v7." Northwest Center for Public Health Practice University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine February 20, 2007. Available at <http://www.cphi.washington.edu/projects/phi-comp>

<sup>3</sup> Yasnoff, William A. et al., "A National Agenda for Public Health Informatics Summarized Recommendations from the 2001 AMIA Spring Congress." J Am Med Inform Assoc. 2001 Nov–Dec; 8(6): 535–545. Also available at <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=130064>

<sup>4</sup> The National Association of County and City Health Officials. Informatics at Local Health Departments: Findings from the 2005 National Profile of Local Health Department Study. February 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. The Public Health Informatics Workforce. Issue Report, July 2006.

Also available at [www.astho.org/pubs/InformaticsWorkforceIssueReport.pdf](http://www.astho.org/pubs/InformaticsWorkforceIssueReport.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Yasnoff, William A. et al., “A National Agenda for Public Health Informatics Summarized Recommendations from the 2001 AMIA Spring Congress.” J Am Med Inform Assoc. 2001 Nov–Dec; 8(6): 535–545.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### **Record of Action**

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