

04-06

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Voluntary Accreditation of Local Health Departments

#### Policy

National accreditation has the potential to improve the quality and performance of public health agencies and to publicly hold local health departments (LHDs) accountable to their governing bodies, policymakers, and the communities they serve.<sup>1-4</sup> In light of this potential, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO):

- Supports the development of Public Health Accreditation Board's (PHAB's) voluntary national accreditation program for state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments;
- Supports PHAB, whose process, standards and criteria are continuously improved, evidence-based and nurturing a culture of quality improvement within those departments seeking voluntary accreditation;
- Supports voluntary accreditation standards based on NACCHO's Operational Definition of a Local Health Department;
- Supports a voluntary accreditation process which is affordable to those LHDs seeking voluntary accreditation;
- Encourages each governmental entity responsible for public health at the local level to participate in accreditation; and
- Supports a systems development-based approach to the PHAB accreditation program that includes the provision of expertise, tools, incentives, and other resources to health departments.

#### Justification

With the emergence of the Institute of Medicine's landmark report in 1988, *The Future of Public Health*, several large-scale efforts have significantly influenced local public health practice and initiated a movement toward accreditation.<sup>5-9</sup> These efforts included NACCHO's development of the *Operational Definition of a Functional Local Health Department*, composed of standards that describe the responsibilities that every person, regardless of where they live, should reasonably expect their governmental local public health department to fulfill.<sup>10</sup> NACCHO has supported the movement towards accreditation for many years as part of a desire to promote the consistency of and accountability for the delivery and provision of public health services.<sup>4</sup> <sup>11</sup> This support includes specific backing for the establishment of PHAB in 2007, in conjunction with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the National Association of Local Boards of Health, and the American Public Health Association.



NACCHO's continued support for PHAB is the result of 1) PHAB's stated goal of improving and protecting the health of the public by advancing the quality and performance of governmental public health departments and 2) PHAB's embodiment of elements that NACCHO has articulated as essential to successful accreditation programs for local public health departments.<sup>12</sup> In addition to those articulated in the policy section above, the essential elements include:

- Involvement of LHDs in the planning and implementation of the program;
- Standards that reinforce local and state health departments' roles and demonstrate shared accountability; and
- Accommodation of existing state-based accreditation and performance standards programs that share core elements of PHAB's program.

### Record of Action

*Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors*

*July 14, 2004*

*Updated July 12, 2005*

*Updated July 29, 2009*

1. Thielen, L. (2004). Exploring public health experience with standards and accreditation: is it time to stop talking about how every public health department is unique?.
2. Mays, G. (2004). Can accreditation work in public health? Lessons from other service industries.
3. Beitsch, L., Thielen, L., Mays, G., et al. The Multistate learning Collaborative, states as laboratories: informing the national public health accreditation dialogue. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*. 2006; 12 (3): 217-231.
4. Exploring Accreditation Project Steering Committee (2006). Final Recommendations for a Voluntary National Accreditation Program for state and local public health departments.
5. Institute of Medicine (1998). The Future of Public Health.
6. Core Public Health Functions Project (1994). The Public Health Workforce: An Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.
7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). *National Public Health Performance Standards Program*.
8. Committee on Assuring the Health of the Public (2002). The Future of the Public's Health. Institute of Medicine.
9. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.(2003). The Futures Initiative.
10. National Association of County and City Health Officials (2005). *Operational Definition of a Functional Local Health Department*.
11. NACCHO Resolution on Voluntary Accreditation of Local Health Departments, adopted July 2004.
12. Public Health Accreditation Board Web site: [www.phaboard.org](http://www.phaboard.org).