

04-11

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Strengthening Local Health Department Epidemiology and Surveillance Capacities

Policy

Public health surveillance and epidemiologic investigation are core functions of local health departments. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) urges increased federal support for strengthening local health departments' epidemiology and surveillance capacities to promote and improve evidence-based public health practice at local health departments.

NACCHO strongly supports local health departments having dedicated resources for epidemiology staffing and the development of integrated surveillance systems and mechanisms to facilitate access, collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate local health data. Similarly, NACCHO urges that local- and state-reported data in such systems be equally accessible to local, state, and federal jurisdictions and that local health departments have access to other relevant datasets developed within their locale (e.g., healthcare associated infections data available from the national healthcare safety network from hospitals in their jurisdictions; school performance and attendance databases; and, community health needs assessment data from local public hospitals or other organizations).

Justification

Epidemiology and surveillance capacities include having sufficiently trained personnel and systems to: 1) rapidly recognize and respond effectively to disease outbreaks, chronic diseases, and other public health issues; 2) monitor and analyze the incidence and prevalence of diseases, risk factors and conditions of public health significance; 3) provide local health departments and their constituents with accurate and timely data to ensure sufficient resource allocation to areas and populations of greatest need; 4) design public health programs; and 5) evaluate the effectiveness of local programs, interventions, and policies.

Epidemiology and surveillance capacities are essential to assure implementation of the three core functions of public health at the local level. Those core functions are assessment, policy development, and assurance. The strategic assignment of trained epidemiologists for technical assistance and support to local health departments will enable the development of appropriate population-based health metrics, ongoing improvement of public health response protocols and interventions, and improvement of community health outcomes.

In addition, data files of local public health significance that are traditionally stored at the state or federal government levels or by local or regional non-governmental organizations should be readily accessible to the local health department and be designed for analysis by local staff to address local public health priorities. Data that can be disaggregated by census tract, zip code, county, city, and/or region are integral to developing and implementing evidence-based public health programs, interventions, and priorities.¹

References

1 Luck J., Chang C, Brown EC and John Lumpkin J. Using local health information to promote public health: issues, barriers, and proposed solutions to improve information flow. Health Affairs. 2006;25:975-991

Record of Action

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