

04-06

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Voluntary Accreditation of Local Health Departments

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) voluntary national accreditation program as a means to continuously improve the performance of local health departments. NACCHO encourages incentivizing local health departments to seek accreditation and reaccreditation through PHAB, without penalty to non-accredited health departments. The accreditation program should hold every local health department, regardless of size, structure, or governance, to the same standards and review process. PHAB should continue to work with its strategic partners to enable and enhance pathways to accreditation for small and rural health departments, including evaluation of the effectiveness of its PHAB Pathways Recognition program as a step toward accreditation. PHAB should maintain affordable accreditation fees for local health departments.

NACCHO encourages PHAB to continually evolve accreditation expectations by incorporating Public Health 3.0 concepts and other state of the art public health concepts and models. PHAB should evaluate and consider revision to all aspects of the accreditation program, when appropriate, as part of its own ongoing continuous quality improvement process, including continued dialogue with stakeholders and sharing of research findings. PHAB is encouraged to also ensure that accreditation standards and accredited health departments adhere to data-driven practices and address misinformation. NACCHO supports ongoing research to determine whether PHAB's structure and processes drive continuous improvement in the performance of local health departments and to investigate the link between accredited health departments and greater effectiveness, and improved population health.

NACCHO Promotes and encourages increased, sustained, and sufficient financial and other investments in local health departments as a means to build infrastructure and capacity, workforce, data systems, community engagement, and health equity. Local departments of health are encouraged to engage in accreditation preparation activities as part of their performance improvement efforts. Local health departments should seek to develop and align with the PHAB standards. National partner organizations should continue to seek to provide technical support and assistance to health departments working to meet the accreditation requirements.



Justification

The PHAB voluntary national accreditation program has the potential to continuously improve the performance of local health departments and to demonstrate a form of public accountability to governing bodies, policymakers, and communities served.¹⁻⁴

Accreditation should be looked at as an investment by local health departments and their governing entities. Accreditation programs for other local government services, including law enforcement and fire, have shown that accreditation holds the potential to improve a department and its services, making it more cost efficient.^{5, 6}

PHAB launched its voluntary national accreditation program in September 2011. The movement towards this program was driven by several factors, including two IOM reports, *The Future of Public Health* (1988) and *The Future of Public Health in the 21st Century* (2002), both of which encouraged accreditation as a way to strengthen governmental public health infrastructure.^{7, 8} The IOM report *For the Public's Health: Revitalizing Law and Policy to Meet New Challenges* (2011) includes a recommendation for public health accreditation through PHAB's program.⁹ 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 services by local health departments. This support included the development of the *Blueprint for a Healthy Community: A Guide for Local Health Departments* and the *Operational Definition of a Functional Local Health Department*; participation in the Steering Committee for the *Exploring Accreditation* report; and backing 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.^{10, 11, 4} PHAB has demonstrated its commitment to its own improvement, evolving the standards and measures for health departments on a consistent basis. Version 2022 better aligns with the Essential Public Health Services, Foundational Public Health Services model, and increases the focus on health equity.

Public Health 3.0, A Call to Action to Create a 21st Century Public Health Infrastructure recommends that "PHAB criteria and processes for department accreditation be enhanced and supported so as to best foster Public Health 3.0 principles, as we strive to ensure that every person in the United States is served by nationally accredited health departments." The report specifically recommends that "PHAB should continue to evolve accreditation expectations by incorporating Public Health 3.0 concepts." Further, "PHAB and its strategic partners should continue to enable pathways to accreditation for small and rural health departments."¹⁵

NACCHO supports PHAB and its goals to improve and protect the public's health through continuous quality improvement, with the hope that future research will confirm the link between accreditation and improved population health outcomes. NACCHO recognizes the potential for local health departments to leverage other national initiatives, including the IRS Community Benefit regulations, Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships, Healthy People 2020, and the National Prevention Strategy, to assist them in building partnerships and aligning current work with accreditation.¹²⁻¹⁴

References

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Record of Action

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