Getting to the Good Place
ASSESSING LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH ETHICS CAPACITY

NACCHO’s 2022 Local Public Health Ethics Capacity Assessment examined the current state of public health ethics practice in local health departments (LHDs). This infographic highlights the strengths and gaps the 79 LHD respondents (51% response rate) identified in the survey, including opportunities for national organizations to strengthen LHD public health ethics capacity.

LHDs arrive at ethical dilemmas every day
As LHDs balance individual rights and a community’s claims to health and safety, ethical dilemmas arise related to:

- **Self-determination** (e.g., end-of-life issues, chemical dependency, school vaccine exemptions)
- **Harassment** directed at LHD leaders and staff in response to public health protections
- **Equity considerations** (e.g., vaccine prioritization for vulnerable populations)

LHDs address these dilemmas informally
More than one-third of LHDs lack a formal process to identify and resolve ethical issues, but many have an informal infrastructure.

- **57%** of LHDs consult with lawyers or other legal experts
- **54%** of LHDs have an internal policy to address issues
- **36%** of LHDs engage an established ethics committee

LHDs face roadblocks to addressing dilemmas
The barriers to identifying and resolving ethical issues that arise in public health practice are varied and include:

**Identifying public health ethics issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of LHDs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessing relevant resources</td>
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<td>Training staff adequately</td>
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<td>Understanding ethics definitions</td>
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<td>Identifying appropriate ethics issues</td>
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**Resolving public health ethics issues**

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<th>Percent of LHDs</th>
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<td>Gathering appropriate stakeholders</td>
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<td>Facilitating the deliberation process</td>
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<td>Coming to consensus on a decision</td>
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Public Health Ethics Committees: An Example

“‘Our committee provides input that contributes to the analysis and deliberation of an issue. This includes community values and perspectives, alternate courses of action, and how ethical principles might be balanced in proposed courses of action.’—Fairfax County Health District, VA

**3 Ways to Drive Local Capacity**

**1. Clarify the scope of public health ethics**
By collaborating with federal agencies and national organizations to define what constitutes a public health ethical issue and sharing resources on how to identify and address them.

**2. Support the creation of public health ethics committees**
By developing resources that highlight best practices for:
- The role of an ethics committee
- Key stakeholders that should be engaged in an ethics committee
- How ethics committees deliberate cases and come to a consensus on ethical decisions

**3. Facilitate partnerships to address ethical dilemmas**
Between LHDs and other organizations, especially:
- Health care systems
- Other government departments
- Academic institutions
- Community-based organizations