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STATEMENT OF POLICY

Evidence-Based Public Health

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports evidence-based public health practice including the following recommendations for local health departments:

Evidence-based Practice and Research

- Use analytical tools and methods for evaluating evidence to determine the effectiveness and feasibility of population-based interventions.¹
- Increase use of participatory approaches that actively involve community members in research and intervention projects.
- Use participatory approaches to conduct sound evaluation and disseminating what is learned to key in all other stakeholders and decision makers.
- Research scientific literature evidenced-based practice recommendations to identify which interventions would be the most appropriate to utilize in addressing health or policy issues prior to implementation.
- Rigorously evaluate, document and record new practices when research is unavailable to further inform the evidence base.
- Promote utilization of public health surveillance: the ongoing systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of specific health data, closely integrated with the timely dissemination of these data to those responsible for preventing and controlling disease or injury.
- Informs, advocates, and defends policies, programs, and resources that improve health in the community.

Local Public Health Practice and Evidence-Based Public Health (EBPH)

- Utilize Community Health Assessments (CHA) / Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) to identify local public health problems and identify what type of local public health action needed to help inform how EBPH practices are used.²
- Distribute newly recommended community-level and population-based interventions with evidence of effectiveness.
- Showing the use of evidence-based practice in local communities to address health concerns enhances the local health departments' application to become a fully accredited-public health agency.
- Whenever possible, local health departments should evaluate both existing and new practices to help inform the field and build the case for new evidence.



- Make decisions using the best available peer-reviewed evidence (both qualitative and quantitatively researched).
- Promote the integration of Health in All Policies (HiAP) and HIA (Health Impact Assessment): as a scientific method that seeks to estimate the probable population health impacts of a policy or intervention in non-health sectors including agriculture, transportation, community design, and economic development. The findings from these assessments must be used to help inform the evidence-base.

Justification

Evidence-based practice for public health involves using the best available evidence to make informed public health practice decisions.³ Evidence-based public health has been proposed as a practice model that builds upon the success of evidence-based medicine (EBM). EBM has been described as a more scientific and systematic approach to the practice of medicine. It has enhanced medical training and practice in many settings. Both EBM and EBPH systematically use data, information, and scientific principles to enhance clinical care and population health, respectively.⁴

EBPH Practice and Research: In Local Communities

The foundation for evidence-based public health practice is a combination of multidisciplinary empirical research and evaluation evidence, community beliefs and opinions, accumulated public health practice, and other local considerations.⁵ The knowledge gleaned from this research is used to develop policies and practices that improve health outcomes and performance as well as allowing for more efficient use of resources. Calls for practitioners to include the concepts of EBPH in their work are increasing as the United States embarks upon the national agenda for health goals and objectives that constitutes the Healthy People 2020 initiative. The very mission of Healthy People seeks multi-sectoral action “to strengthen policies and improve practices that are driven by the best available evidence and knowledge.”⁶ “Tribal, state, and local health departments seek formal accreditation to document capacity to deliver the 3 core functions of public health and the Ten Essential Public Health Services. One of 12 domains specified by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) has a required level of achievement in its accreditation process “to contribute to and apply the evidence base of public health.”⁶ This domain emphasizes the importance of the best available evidence and the role of local health departments in adding to evidence for promising practices. The documentation of these processes and their affect build upon old and new public health practice areas. The vigorous investigation and analysis of what works best is captured by gaining lessons learned, testing new applications/interventions, the successes as well as the failures.

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) and Health in All Policies (HiAP)

Health Impact Assessment brings together scientific data, public health expertise, and stakeholder input to identify the potential positive and negative health effects of a proposed policy, plan, program, or project. An HIA offers practical recommendations for ways to minimize risks and capitalize on opportunities to improve health. Local public health takes the recommendations of what will create the greatest health impact to address a health concern and creates a change system that determines how policy decisions are made by government entities that affect health. HiAP emphasizes the need to collaborate across sector to achieve common health goals, and its innovative approach to reviewing processes through which policies are

made. These distinct, yet interconnected change agents of HIA and HiAP help to build a bridge between assessment, decision and practice.

Participatory Approaches Support EBPH Practice

A participatory approach is one in which everyone who has a stake in the intervention has a voice, either in person or by representation. Participants in the process should include the following: staff of the lead organization, members of the population of focus, community officials, interested citizens, and people from involved agencies, schools, and other institutions.

Participation should be welcomed and respected, and the process should not be dominated by any individual or group, or by a single point of view.^{7,8,9,10} Together these factors determine which programs are most likely to be effective in a given jurisdiction.

*Evidence-based practice is defined as “the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective programs and policies in public health through application of principles of scientific reasoning including systematic uses of data and program planning models” in Brownson, Ross C., Gurney, James G., and Land, Garland H. Evidence-Based Decision Making in Public Health. *Journal of Public Health Management Practice*. 1999; 5(5): 86-9

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Record of Action

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