

04-15

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Environmental Public Health Tracking

Policy

Environmental public health tracking (tracking) involves the ongoing and systematic collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data from environmental hazard monitoring, human exposure surveillance, and health effects surveillance.

NACCHO advocates for and supports:

- Federal funding to all 50 states to ensure the most accurate and thorough data gathering and dissemination network possible under design guidelines of the National Environmental Health Tracking Program (Tracking Program).
- Local health department involvement in the on-going development and improvement activities of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (e.g., state-funded grantees to collaborate with their local counterparts) to ensure the utility of the tracking network to local jurisdictions.¹
- Active involvement from local health departments in the definition of data and functional requirements for state and national tracking and surveillance systems as data providers and users of such systems. State and federal public health agencies must ensure that local health departments have timely access to any data collected about their local community.
- Public health policies and surveillance methods to address social injustices that contribute to the disproportionate burden of environmentally-related illnesses and conditions that generate inequity in the distribution of disease among underrepresented, low-income, and socially disadvantaged populations. Such support means monitoring the sources of environmental burdens in the communities of those populations, including new and innovative strategies to identify sources of data typically not captured in traditional surveillance systems. In addition, communities must be involved in the development of tracking systems in order to set priorities and determine appropriate indicators.²
- Local health departments to have near real-time and direct access to data collected in their jurisdictions for state and national tracking and surveillance systems to ensure timely and appropriate response to community concerns and inquiries. In addition, existing legal barriers to local access to data in some state statutes should be minimized or removed.
- Enhancement and maintenance of local public health resources and infrastructure to ensure local health departments can create, access, and use data through national and state supported local mini-grants and local training opportunities. Sufficient information technology resources are necessary to receive and analyze data and these capabilities should be enhanced



and made available for many LHDs that lack current capacity. Sufficient well-trained staff must be available to analyze, interpret and disseminate data.

- Continued and increased funding by federal, state, and local governments for training, technical assistance, data development, and analysis for tracking at the local level.
- Local health departments to use community health improvement planning and assessment tools (e.g. Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships³, Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health⁴ or Health Impact Assessment⁵) in conjunction with national and state tracking and surveillance systems to assess local environmental public health needs.

Justification

During the design phase of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network), the vision included all 50 states funded and connected to this national portal. To truly make this a national network, all states must be involved. Environmentally related illnesses take a great human toll and such conditions are on the rise. Combined with significant gaps in environmental surveillance and exposure data linked to health outcomes, there is a need for coordinating and standardizing the integration, analysis, and dissemination of such information. Local health departments are the traditional entry point for routine disease surveillance and investigation, and function as first responders in a public health emergency. As such, they are keenly aware of the information needed to monitor for public health emergencies and mount response and mitigation activities.

Using information from the tracking network, local, state, and federal agencies are better prepared to develop and evaluate effective public health actions to prevent or control chronic and acute diseases that can be linked to environmental hazards.^{6,7} In addition, the public are better prepared to consider actions they may take or policies to advocate for protecting and improving their health. Overall, tracking creates an improved organizational and technical environment for collecting, managing, exchanging, and using information about a wide array of environmental public health issues and concerns. Environmental health includes health issues beyond contaminants and hazards, such as the contextual characteristics of place, e.g. housing conditions, access to mass transportation, racial segregation, and land use and zoning regulations.

On a local level, these benefits can manifest in any number of specific environmental health innovations. The network makes data sets accessible to examine local level geographic and temporal trends around health outcomes. The analysis of such data sets improves the ability of local health departments to respond to outbreaks, disease clusters, and emerging health threats. Whether tracking the prevalence of asthma, increasing rates of birth defects, or linkages between toxic waste location and cancer clusters, the National Tracking Network offers health departments unprecedented data sets necessary to improving the effectiveness of environmental health interventions.⁸

References

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7. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Keeping Track, Promoting Health*. Retrieved September 20, 2016 from <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/pdfs/healthtracks.pdf>.
8. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network*. Retrieved September 20, 2016 from <http://ephtracking.cdc.gov/>.

Record of Action

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