

12-06

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Healthy Fatherhood and Male Involvement

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the strengthening and building of healthy families through programs and interventions that work with adolescent and adult males to optimize their level of familial involvement and capacity to make unique and irreplaceable contributions to the lives of children.

NACCHO supports the following:

- Development of federal, state, local, and community infrastructure that provides support and systems of services for men that will reduce barriers to male involvement and inclusion in the family unit.
- Establishment of capacity within local health departments and communities to collaborate with men, their families, and their communities to change the systems and structures that prevent men from being active, involved parents, accessing needed resources, and making positive life choices.
- Expansion of family planning programs beyond their traditional woman-focused approach to serve the needs of not only women, but men of all ages.

Justification

In the United States, more than 17 million children lived in father-absent homes in 2014.¹ Research shows that father involvement can have a measurable impact on the socio-emotional development, behavior, academic achievement, and health of children, and therefore is critical to the strength and health of families and communities.² In 2010, approximately one in three (30.3%) families led by female householders with children under 18 years old lived in poverty, compared to just eight percent of those led by married couples.³ Father involvement is not limited to financial support and includes direct care (e.g., bathing), indirect care (e.g., preparing meals), and other opportunities for fathers to spend quality time with their children.⁴

Over the last 40 years, a significant transformation of the American family structure has occurred. In 1960, eight percent of children younger than 18 had non-resident fathers; the rate increased to nearly one in four (23.6%) in 2014.¹ Traditionally, discussions about children's health and well-being have emphasized the relationship of the mother with a child, while overlooking the relationship with the father.⁵ Research demonstrates that fathers play a critical role in children's development and life outcomes. The cost of father absence through increased use of government programs has been estimated at nearly \$100 billion per year.²



Communities have a direct effect on the health of fathers, children, and their families.⁶⁶ Surroundings, opportunities, and conditions of life have a significant impact on the risk and protective factors that influence the health trajectory across the life course. A number of barriers can cause a father to be uninvolved. These barriers include life circumstances, men's health challenges, level of maturity and parenting skills, incarceration, economic stability, substance abuse, and unhealthy relationships with the child's mother. A 2006 survey of fathers found that only 54 percent agreed that they had been adequately prepared for fatherhood.⁷ Efforts to invest in the success of fathers will require innovative, multi-level approaches that work across all spheres (individual, relationship, community, and societal) of the socio-ecological model.

References

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Record of Action

Proposed by NACCHO Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Workgroup

Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors July 2012

Updated October 2016