14-11

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Public Health Preparedness Planning

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) urges local health departments to conduct all-hazards preparedness, mitigation, and recovery planning in accordance with national policy and directives. NACCHO advocates for the integration of local health departments into preparedness, response, and recovery planning activities with other community organizations in order to facilitate the best use of available resources and improve public health outcomes. NACCHO calls for increased federal and state funding to support local health department staff and programs that contribute to quality plan development and maintenance.

NACCHO urges local health departments to embrace the all-hazard preparedness planning. NACCHO supports the continuous funding opportunities available to support local health departments in preparedness planning and emergency response, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) cooperative agreement. NACCHO encourages local health departments to leverage work with state health department colleagues on the PHEP cooperative agreement as an opportunity to identify preparedness gaps and priorities.[1] This work should include completion of or collaboration on a jurisdictional risk assessment that can inform the local health departments' planning efforts. NACCHO encourages local health departments to focus planning efforts on PHEP capabilities community preparedness and community recovery.[2] NACCHO also recommends local health departments identify and address emerging priorities in areas of at-risk populations, public information, hospital/medical surge; administrative and legal preparedness, climate change; and newly emerging infections. In addition, local health departments should ensure their preparedness plans are appropriately maintained by reviewing and revising plans on an annual basis as part of a continuous quality improvement process by incorporating revisions based on trainings, exercises, responses to real events, and stakeholder feedback. NACCHO encourages participation in Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) which builds training and preparedness capacity through a continuous quality improvement model as a means to accomplish this work.[3]

Local health departments need to be fully integrated into preparedness, mitigation, and recovery planning at every level. NACCHO supports a variety of strategies that offers local health departments an active, equal voice in these activities, including the following:

- Developing a positive, active working relationship with emergency management to ensure local health department participation in local and regional preparedness, response, and recovery planning efforts and participation in emergency exercises.

- Developing a positive, active working relationship with state health departments to ensure local health departments' participation in statewide preparedness, response, and recovery planning efforts.
- Leveraging relationships to ensure the integration of community organization representatives in local health department-sponsored preparedness, response, and recovery planning and exercises.
- Effectively and efficiently sharing and using resources with partners in planning, response, and recovery.
- Fully engaging with local healthcare coalitions in response, mitigation, and recovery planning through the Hospital Preparedness Program.[4]

Justification

All hazards preparedness, mitigation, and recovery planning focuses on common planning elements and resources that are used regardless of the type of emergency. The 2016 National Profile of Local Health Departments (Profile) study notes that 87% of local health departments have developed or updated a written emergency plan.[5] Risk-informed capabilities-based planning within an all-hazards context is supported in the National Health Security Strategy (NHSS),[6] the 2008 Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA)[7] and 2013 Reauthorization Act (PAHPRA),[8] the CDC PHEP capabilities,[9] Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Preparedness Goals and National Response Framework (NRF),[10,11] and Presidential Policy Directive 8 – National Preparedness.[10] The overarching theme of all-hazards preparedness is to be able to plan for, respond to, and recover from any threat that poses a risk to public health, whether it is routine, predicted, or emergent.

PAHPRA further identifies the important role of local health departments and public health in preparing to effectively respond to a range of public health threats and in identifying, responding to, and recovering from emerging threats. Some examples of all-hazards planning tools and standards for LHDs include:

- CDC's PHEP capabilities assist state and local public health departments in their strategic planning and serve as national public health preparedness standards. These provide a framework for planning across preparedness issues and can be used to identify gaps and priorities for future focus.
- NACCHO's PPHR criteria, standards to address local preparedness planning, were specifically designed by and for local health departments and are updated regularly to align with federal guidance and policy, national initiatives, and local best practices.
- In addition, the NRF serves as a flexible and scalable all-hazards planning tool for organizations across the country at all levels.

It is imperative that local health departments be aware of new guidance, policies, science, and practices that may be used to further enhance planning for new and emerging priorities. Maintaining a culture of continuous quality improvement through the use of evaluative tools and identifications of lessons learned during real world events and exercises are also critically important to local preparedness and response efforts. At the same time, NACCHO recognizes that quality plan development and maintenance requires resources, funding, and ongoing support. Federal funding for public health preparedness has been steadily declining, and nearly all local health departments rely on this funding to support preparedness planning.

NACCHO's 2016 Profile study notes that 19% of LHDs reported a lower budget for emergency preparedness from the prior fiscal year.[5] Local health departments require sufficient and sustainable funding to support critical activities, including preparedness planning, training, exercising, responding, and recovering. The last several years, the United States has required public health responses to emerging infectious diseases like Ebola and Zika, as well as multiple extreme weather events. Maintaining a stable funding stream for public health preparedness and response activities has a significant positive impact on the effectiveness and the expediency of local response.

Public health input is critically important to all levels of the planning process and local health departments serve a vital role in the preparedness, response, and recovery efforts of a community. PAHPA authorized the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to develop the NHSS, which notes that the health security of the nation requires the commitment of a broad range of stakeholders, and that it is "the responsibility of local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal governments…to implement strategies to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from an incident."[6] The National Health Security Strategy and Implementation Plan, published in 2015 outlines an approach to achieving a health-secure and resilient nation. This Implementation Plan calls for the commitment of the federal government to "maintain robust national capabilities that can augment state and local efforts as needed" in order to support and enhance the integration and effectiveness of the public health, healthcare, and emergency management systems.[13] The NRF, revised in 2013, provides a "whole community" approach for preparedness and recovery planning, and within that framework Emergency Support Function #8, Public Health and Medical Response, puts significant responsibility in the hands of local public health services. Additionally, the NRF notes that local public health organizations are among the first to identify and respond to an emergency, requiring comprehensive preparedness and recovery planning prior to an event.[14] Public health is integral to many Emergency Support Functions; adequate planning and community engagement is needed to fully support those functions. It is becoming more apparent that all disasters and emergencies have a public health component, and that it is important for public health to be integrated into the planning process to ensure comprehensive preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities.

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Record of Action

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