

Research Brief

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Preliminary Results from the 1997 Profile of U.S. Local Health Departments

Introduction

NACCHO recently completed a preliminary analysis of the 1997 Profile of U.S. Local Health Departments. This *Research Brief* answers some frequently asked questions about local health departments (LHDs) using descriptive data from the 1997 Profile dataset.

What are Local Health Departments?

Although there are many different definitions of a "local health department," NACCHO used the following: *An administrative or service unit of local or state government, concerned with health, and carrying some responsibility for the health of a jurisdiction smaller than the state.*

This definition has been used in prior Profile studies, and acknowledges the variety of local public health systems across the country, including town, city, county, and district health departments. Using this definition, surveys were sent to 2,834 LHDs. 2,492 returned completed surveys yielding a response rate of 88%. The survey was intended to be a census of local health agencies and included both members and non-members of NACCHO.

Who do LHDs serve?

The majority of LHDs across the country are county-based health departments that serve jurisdictions with under 50,000 population.

Population of Jurisdiction	Frequency	Percent
0 to 49,999	1629	65%
50,000 to 99,999	364	15%
100,000 to 499,999	408	16%
500,000+	96	4%
Total	2492	100%

What is the average staff size of a LHD?

The median number of staff employed by health agencies is 20, including both full- and part-time staff members. The mean or "average" staff size is 88, although staff size ranges from one to 21,700. When analyzing staff positions in full-time equivalents, the median is 16 and mean is 72.

What services do LHDs provide?

Local health departments provide a variety of public health services to protect and ensure the health of their

jurisdictions. State structures, local governments, and specific historical and political contexts all shape the types of services LHDs provide and how they are delivered. Several common services and the percent of health departments that provide, contract to provide or contribute resources to provide them are listed below.

Service Category	% Providing, Contracting, or Contributing Resources to Provide Service
Adult influenza immunizations	92%
Childhood Immunizations	93%
Communicable Disease Control	91%
Community Assessment	76%
Comprehensive Primary Care	20%
Epidemiology & Surveillance	83%
Family Planning	65%
Food & Milk Inspections	66%
High Blood Pressure Screening	86%
Injury Control	49%
Lead Screening & Abatement	82%
Maternal Health Programs	75%
Prenatal Care	57%
Solid Waste Management	56%
STD Counseling &	70%

Testing	
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Who do LHDs work with?

Many LHDs are located in jurisdictions served by local boards of health (LBHs). In 1997, 81% of Profile respondents reported working with a LBH. Local public health systems involve a number of different stakeholders. Community partnerships and collaborative relationships have become an increasingly large part of contemporary public health practice, as illustrated by the number of different partners that local health departments work with to improve health in their communities.

Partner	% Reporting Collaboration
State Health Agency	83%
Other LHD	72%
Hospitals	67%
Other Unit(s) of Government	62%
Non-Profit & Voluntary Groups	64%
Universities & Academic Centers	52%
Businesses	44%
Community Health Centers	39%
Faith Communities	37%
Insurance Companies	19%

How Can I Get More Data & Information?

The 1997 Profile of U.S. Local Health Departments Dataset contains a vast amount of data on local public health departments. This Research Brief summarizes highlights. Additional issues will present other analyses, including longitudinal studies of LHDs using Profile datasets from 1989 and 1992-1993. ?

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