

# Local health departments in the U.S. increasingly play a role in improving access to behavioral and mental health services for communities

## Behavioral and Mental Health Related Activities of Local Health Departments (LHDs), 2010–2019

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### Research Objective

To assess changes in LHD activities to address mental and behavioral health from 2010–2019

### Study Data

Three years of NACCHO’s nationally representative, cross sectional National Profile of LHDs study  
(Profile; [www.naccho.org/profile](http://www.naccho.org/profile))

### Introduction

There has been an increasing and much needed focus on the importance of mental and behavioral health across the U.S. due to increasing opioid overdose deaths and suicides. As such, LHDs are called on to play a more active role in prevention and response.

### Methods

Seven measures on either LHDs’ activities assuring access to mental and behavioral health services or LHDs’ activities related to mental health policy and advocacy were used from NACCHO’s Profile surveys. Proportions and confidence intervals were first calculated for each year the measure was collected. Analyses were weighted to provide nationally representative estimates per year. Proportion tests were used to test for differences between the first and last year of data collection for each measure.

### Results

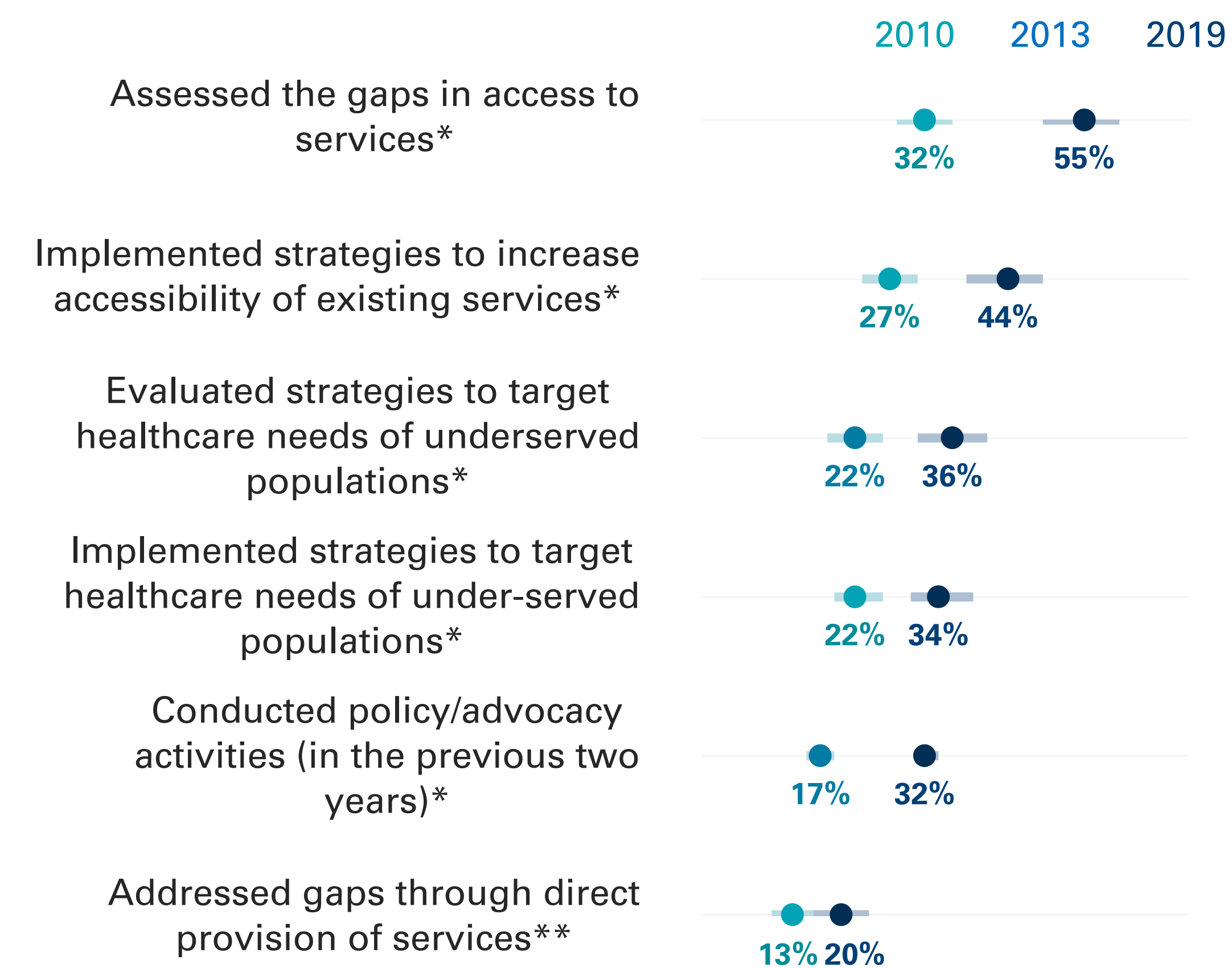
Overall, mental and behavioral health activities were not conducted by large proportions of LHDs, but there were significant increases in many prevention and support activities. From 2010 to 2019, the proportion of LHDs that assessed gaps in access to services, implemented strategies to increase accessibility of services or to target underserved population each increased significantly. From 2013 to 2019, the proportion of LHDs that had activities related to mental health policy increased significantly. The proportion of LHDs with a new/revised ordinance related to mental health did not show a statistically significant change across time, with 2% of LHDs in 2013 and 3% in 2019. In 2019, the proportions of mental/behavioral health activities are higher among larger LHDs.

### Implications

It will be important for LHDs to continue to improve these mental and behavioral health activities for better outcomes in communities. To better support LHDs and expand upon this growth in mental and behavioral health activities, funding, technical assistance, education on best practices, and the authority to work in this area will be required.

**Figure 1. Percent of LHDs Engaging in Mental/Behavioral Health Related Activities Significantly Increased Over Time**

(only first and last year of data collection for each measure are shown; shading behind the dot represents 95% CIs)



\*p<0.001  
\*\*p=0.006

**Figure 2. Percent of LHDs Engaging in Mental/Behavioral Health Related Activities in 2019 Differs by Population Size Served**

(LHD size small <50,000; medium 50,000-499,999; large 500,000+ population served)

