

Local Health Department Budget Cuts and Job Losses: Findings from the 2014 Forces of Change Survey



Background

The economic recession has posed major challenges to local health departments (LHDs). Substantial funding cutbacks from federal, state, and local sources have undermined the ability of LHDs to provide essential services to their communities. Since 2008, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) has administered Web-based surveys to LHDs across the United States to assess the impact of economic recession on LHDs. The results have consistently demonstrated LHDs' funding challenges and the negative impacts on LHD infrastructures. This research brief describes budget cuts and workforce reductions among LHDs in 2013.

Results

Job Losses

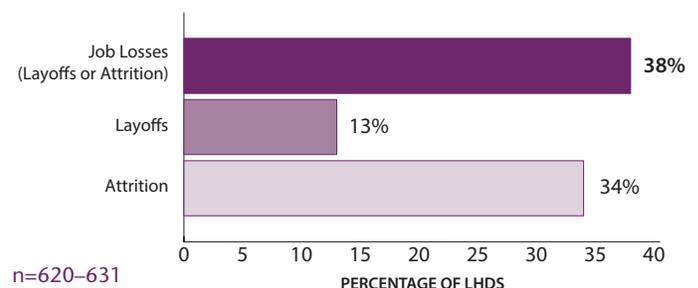
LHDs eliminated 1,800 positions through layoffs and 2,600 by attrition in 2013 (Figure 1). Since 2008, LHDs have collectively lost 48,300 jobs due to layoffs and attrition.

FIGURE 1: Estimated Number of LHD Job Losses in 2013 and Job Losses Since 2008

Job Losses (Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2013)	
Layoffs	1,800
Attrition	2,600
TOTAL	4,400
Job Losses (Layoffs and Attrition) (2008–2013)	
2008	7,000
2009	16,000
2010	6,000
2011	10,600
2012	4,300
2013	4,400
TOTAL	48,300

During 2013, more than one-third (38%) of LHDs lost at least one position due to layoffs or attrition, with 13 percent reporting at least one layoff and 34 percent at least one position lost through attrition (Figure 2).

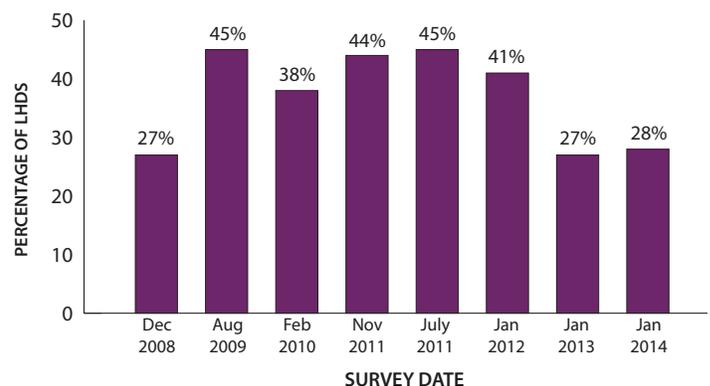
FIGURE 2: Percentage of LHDs Losing Workforce Capacity, Overall and by Type



Budget Cuts

When asked in early 2014, 28 percent of LHDs across the nation reported cuts to their budgets in the current fiscal year, approximately the same proportion of LHDs that reported a reduced budget in early 2013 (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: LHDs with Budget Cuts (2008–2014)



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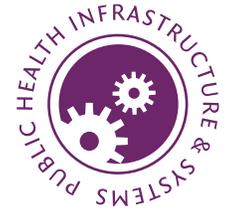


Figure 4 shows the proportion of LHDs that experienced budget cuts in the current fiscal year or expected to have budget cuts in the coming fiscal year by size of population served and type of governance. LHDs serving populations of 500,000 or more and LHDs with shared governance were more likely to report budget cuts. LHDs with shared governance were also more likely to expect a lower budget in the coming fiscal year than LHDs with local or state governance.

Thirty-six percent of the U.S. population lives in one of the jurisdictions currently affected by budget cuts (not shown). Looking ahead, 29 percent of LHDs anticipated budget cuts in the next fiscal year. Based on this projection, a third of the U.S. population will continue to be affected.

FIGURE 4: Percentage of LHDs with Budget Cuts or Expecting Budget Cuts in the Next Fiscal Year, by Size of Population Served and Type of Governance

LHD Characteristics	Lower Budget	Expect Lower Budget in the Next Fiscal Year
All LHDs	28%	29%
<i>Size of Population Served</i>		
<50,000	23%	28%
50,000–499,999	32%	29%
500,000+	42%	33%
<i>Type of Governance</i>		
State	27%	24%
Local	24%	26%
Shared	59%	59%

n=606–621

Discussion

A sizeable proportion of LHDs were still affected by budget cuts in 2013. While the proportion of LHDs reporting budget cuts is lower now than when the Great Recession first began, similar percentages of LHDs experienced budget cuts in 2012 and 2013. One out of three LHDs also anticipates budget cuts

in the next fiscal year, indicating budget cuts will continue to affect LHDs in 2014.

Similarly, approximately the same number of jobs was lost in LHDs in 2013 as in 2012, with more than one-third of LHDs cutting positions as a result of layoffs or attrition.

Despite economic recovery in other sectors of the United States, many LHDs still face financial hardships. LHDs make it easier for people to be healthy and safe. Ongoing budget cuts and resulting staff layoffs jeopardize the safety of the food we eat, the water we drink, and the ability to be prepared for and respond to disasters and public health emergencies. The cumulative effect of these cuts since 2008 threatens the ability of LHDs to provide basic services that people count on. Lost LHD jobs mean reductions in services offered—from reducing maternal and child health clinic hours to ending substance abuse treatment programs, among others. Substantive and consistent funding is critical to ensure LHDs' ability to address various health needs in their communities.

Methods

NACCHO distributed the Forces of Change Survey to a statistically representative sample of 957 LHDs in the United States from January to February 2014. The survey included questions on budget cuts and job losses. A total of 648 LHDs completed the survey (response rate of 68%). National statistics were generated using estimation weights to account for sampling and non-response. All data were self-reported; NACCHO did not independently verify the data provided by LHDs. A detailed description of survey methodology is available on NACCHO's Forces of Change webpage at www.naccho.org/topics/research/forcesofchange.

Acknowledgments

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