



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

The Top Three National Policy Priorities for NACCHO in 2018

Q&A with Laura Hanen, MPP, Interim Executive Director and Chief of Government Affairs
The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

Washington, DC, February 5, 2018 — The [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO) represents the nation’s nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. Here Laura Hanen discusses the organization’s top government affairs issues for 2018.

Q. Ms. Hanen, what are the three most pressing issues for local health departments this year?

I think protecting the Prevention and Public Health Fund, reauthorization of the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act, and dealing with the country’s deadly opioid crisis are most important to our members.

Q. Why is defending the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) so important? Aren’t there other funding streams available to local health departments?

The Prevention and Public Health Fund is a critical funding lifeline for local health departments. The money comes to them through state health departments from the CDC. Local health departments need this financial support to sustain the health and safety of the communities they serve. For example, right now the entire country except Hawaii is suffering through a particularly bad flu season. According to the latest report, more than

50 children have died. Many local health departments offer free flu shots in the fall anticipating flu season. Losing financial support for preventative care could have dire consequences for communities and impact those most in need of services. All Americans need to have access both to primary healthcare and the prevention programs and services provided by health departments. There is also an important health equity issue here. Some of the most vulnerable in our communities including children, minorities and seniors look to care from their local health departments.

Q. Okay. You said another policy priority for your members is the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act. What is that? Doesn't a pandemic refer to an *international epidemic*?

Local health departments are able to act quickly to protect people in their communities during emergencies because of ongoing public health preparedness activities. They develop emergency plans, purchase the equipment and supplies necessary to execute plans, train their workforce and conduct exercises to test plans, and use lessons learned from the trainings and exercises to improve those plans.

To support these activities, every 5 years, the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA) (H.R.307) requires on an act of Congress for its reauthorization. The law was last extended in 2013. In 2018, coming off major natural disasters in California, Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands, discussions will center on how the law can be strengthened to ensure robust public health and health care preparedness and response capabilities. Most importantly for local health departments, the law authorizes the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program, the Hospital Preparedness Program, and the Medical Reserve Corps. These programs support local readiness and response to emergencies. More than half of local health departments rely on federal funding alone to support their emergency preparedness activities.

Q. Let's discuss the opioid epidemic. Is the situation improving?

Unfortunately, we are losing ground, while Congress and the White House continue to discuss the extent of the problem while failing to provide any additional funds. Since 2000, the number of deaths related to opioid overdose has quadrupled, with over 60,000

lethal drug overdoses in 2016. And, here is still an immediate need for a surge in resources, dedicated funding, and a coordinated federal, state, and local response. However, the declaration of an opioid public health emergency and not *a state of national emergency* does not go far enough. Much more money is needed to implement the programs we know will help our communities.

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About NACCHO

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