

# 2026 Federal Legislative and Policy Agenda

NACCHO's mission is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for the over 3,300 local health departments across the country. The Federal Legislative and Policy Agenda guides NACCHO's work in its interactions with federal agencies and Congress. The Agenda is informed by local health department input and approved annually by the Board of Directors.

In 2026, NACCHO will continue to advocate on behalf of all aspects of local health department activities including responding to and recovering from public health emergencies and addressing the wide range of public health challenges faced at the community level. To advance thoughtful investment and to ensure federal policy is responsive to and supportive of our members. **NACCHO advocates for meaningful inclusion of local health department expertise in policy planning and implementation and for designated federal funding for local health departments.**

Moreover, federal public health guidance needs to be clear, consistent, and science-based to support local public health activities. Mpox, measles, H5N1, lead-contaminated applesauce pouches, and other recent public health emergencies highlight the critical role of governmental public health — especially local health departments — in assuring the health and safety of the country. They also expose the need for enhanced funding predictability and coordination across local, state, and federal public health sectors.

Therefore, NACCHO will continue efforts to 1) push for robust federal investment to strengthen the public health workforce; 2) bolster and improve access to federal funding to support core public health functions, including sustainable, flexible, disease-agnostic resourc-

es for public health infrastructure and data modernization; and 3) work to address the many challenges that local health departments face in coalition with other stakeholders.



## Public Health Workforce

The public health workforce – the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system – faces significant challenges. Local health departments lost 21 percent of their workforce capacity in the decade before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> While pandemic-era supplemental funds temporarily bolstered the workforce during the height of the emergency to near 2008 levels nationally, the positions added largely supported

## NACCHO's 2026 Legislative Priorities

- Strengthen and support the public health workforce
- Bolster and improve access to federal public health funding, including designated resources to support public health infrastructure and data modernization at the local health department level
- Ensure federal public health funding flows from the federal level to states and local health departments quickly and equitably
- Address a broad range of public health concerns through work in coalition with partners

temporary contract workers, particularly at very large local health departments, while many smaller health departments saw very little, if any, staffing increases during the emergency.<sup>ii</sup> In all cases, the supplemental funding that supported these increases is expiring or has been clawed-back, causing an imminent funding (and workforce) cliff.<sup>iii, iv</sup>

an increase of nearly 80 percent with the majority of positions needed at the local health department level—to provide a minimum set of public health services.<sup>v</sup> That estimate encompasses only how many positions are needed to provide a minimum set of services, without accounting for additional workforce that may be temporarily required to respond to an emergency like a measles outbreak, natural disaster, or other more localized challenges. Local health departments of all sizes and levels of rurality need sustained, flexible funding to support their workforce for the long term to handle the daily needs of their community, as well as to be better positioned when emergencies strike.

The need to expand the local health department workforce is compounded by pressures that may lead existing workers to leave the field. A 2022 analysis found that nearly one-third of the public health workforce is considering leaving their organization in the next year and 44 percent said they are considering leaving within the next five years. Whether or not they plan to leave, more than half of current public health workers reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

and many are struggling with their mental health.<sup>vi</sup> In a separate 2024 study, about 70% of local public health practitioners reported symptoms of burnout, which could lead to high levels of turnover.<sup>vii</sup>

Combined, these forces highlight the need for additional efforts to shore up the local health department workforce to meet the needs of each community and achieve national public health goals. After significant advocacy by NACCHO and coalition partners, Congress reauthorized the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program in 2022, representing a significant step forward. In 2026, NACCHO will work with Congress to reauthorize the program and secure adequate funding and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to implement this targeted loan repayment program to support and sustain this new federal loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve three years in a local, state, or tribal health department.

NACCHO will also continue to support the vital work of local public health officials and staff in the face of increased politicization and threats of violence. Between March 2020 and September 2022, seven in 10 local health departments reported harassment, while three in ten reported harassment related to public health measures in 2023.<sup>viii</sup> These threats of violence were made real during a shooting in August 2025 targeting CDC's Atlanta campus. In addition, local health departments' authority to carry out their missions has also been



curtailed, with numerous new state laws passed across a majority of states that limit or transfer public health authority.<sup>ix</sup> These laws remove authority from public health agencies to exercise their expertise, and the flexibility needed for day-to-day public health protection and emergency response.<sup>x</sup> NACCHO will work to restore and preserve local health department authority and to bolster mental health resources and supports for local public health professionals.



## Public Health Funding

Federal investments in the work of local health departments is critical to achieving the health security goals of the country.

NACCHO will continue its efforts to ensure strong federal investments in public health programs and that those investments efficiently and equitably make it to local health departments at the community level. This is particularly important as recent claw-backs from Congress have eliminated planned projects to rebuild the system and prepare for future emergencies, putting additional strain on general appropriations from Congress.

**Rebuild and sustain the governmental public health system:** Measles, mpox, the opioid crisis, and other recent public health emergencies have reinforced the need for sustained investment in local health departments to enable them to address existing public health challenges and be prepared to respond to future public health emergencies.

**NACCHO calls for sustainable, disease-agnostic funding to support local public health infrastructure, including data modernization and workforce development.**

**Support the important role of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** CDC has unmatched expertise and experience in tackling a broad array of public health issues, including new and emerg-



ing challenges, which local health departments benefit from. In addition, approximately 80% of CDC's domestic budget is granted out of the agency to support the work of local and state health departments. NACCHO will continue to advocate for robust funding for CDC so the agency can effectively support programs to address federal, state, and local public health priorities.

**Other appropriations:** NACCHO will continue to advocate for strong appropriations for public health programs within the CDC, Food and Drug Administration, HRSA, and the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response. NACCHO also opposes cuts to the authorization levels of the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

**Ensure funding reaches local health departments:** It is important that all entities throughout the continuum of governmental public health are empowered and resourced to work together to support our shared mission. Unfortunately, federal funding intended by Congress to support all levels of the governmental public health enterprise continues to have variable reach (e.g., in amount, timeliness, and requirements) to local public health agencies. Therefore, NACCHO will

continue to advocate for substantial investments in the governmental public health system at all levels (federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial), **as well as funding designated specifically for local health departments so that they can continue to lead on all public health priorities.** NACCHO also supports **public tracking of disbursement of federal public health funds down to the local health department level** to identify best practices and address challenges. Such transparency and accountability should be accompanied by **greater local health department involvement** and consensus in state public health decision-making concerning the distribution and uses of federal funds at the local level.



## Supporting Public Health through Coalitions and Partnerships

NACCHO will continue to work in coalition with partners to address broad public health challenges including:

- **Access to healthcare**, including insurance and Medicaid
- **Behavioral and mental health services**
- **Chronic disease prevention**, including active living, nutrition, and food security
- **Informatics**, including interoperable data exchange between public health and healthcare providers
- **Emergency preparedness**
- **Environmental health**, including extreme weather events, food and water safety, and vector-borne diseases
- **HIV, STI, and viral hepatitis prevention**
- **Infectious disease prevention**, including vaccines and antimicrobial resistance
- **Injury and violence prevention**, including gun violence
- **Maternal and child health promotion**

- **Reproductive health** and family planning services
- **Substance use disorder prevention and treatment**
- **Tobacco control and prevention**, including teen

## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> NACCHO, 2022 National Profile of Local Health Departments, [https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/NACCHO\\_2022\\_Profile\\_Report.pdf](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/NACCHO_2022_Profile_Report.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, Public Health Preparedness: Building and Maintaining Infrastructure through the COVID-19 Pandemic, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-105891>
- <sup>iv</sup> NBC News. "CDC is pulling back \$11B in Covid funding sent to health departments across the U.S." <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-pulling-back-11b-covid-funding-sent-health-departments-us-rcna198006>
- <sup>v</sup> de Beaumont Foundation and Public Health National Center for Innovations, Staffing Up: Investing in Public Health Workforce, <https://debeaumont.org/staffing-up/>
- <sup>vi</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>vii</sup> McCall, T. C., Perkins, K., & Alford, A. A. (2026). Burn-out, belonging, and mental well-being: Predictors of turnover intent among local public health professionals. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 32(1S), S25-32. <https://www.doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0000000000002274>

viii NACCHO. "When Protecting the Public's Health Turns into Threats Against Public Health: Experiences of Harassment among Local Health Departments." <https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/when-protecting-the-publics-health-turns-into-threats-against-public-health-experiences-of-harassment-among-local-health-departments#:~:text=While%20the%20majority%20of%20LHDs,was%20through%20a%20local%20entity>

<sup>ix</sup> Kaiser Health News, Over Half of States Have Rolled Back Public Health Powers in Pandemic, <https://khn.org/news/article/over-half-of-states-have-rolled-back-public-health-powers-in-pandemic/>

<sup>x</sup> Network for Public Health Law, State Laws Limiting Public Health Protections: Hazardous for Our Health. Retrieved November 20, 2023, from <https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Analysis-of-State-Laws-Limiting-Public-Health-Protections-1.pdf>

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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