

## NACCHO Talking Points

### 2021 Meetings with Members of Congress/staff

- Thank you for meeting with me/us today.
- As we are all aware, we are in the midst of the most challenging public health emergency in 100 years.
- Local health departments like mine are on the front lines of the COVID-19 response; they have been and will continue to be.
- Over 200 local and state health officials have left their positions during the pandemic due to politicization, harassment, termination, and burnout—we are managing pandemic response with a razor thin workforce.
- We are using our expertise and local partnerships to protect people from the virus, track where the disease is spreading, and educate the public about how to stay safe. We have a unique understanding of the impact of the virus at the local level and the challenges that are plaguing the response. **{Here you should talk about local factors in your community.}**
- Local health departments are key to a successful vaccine rollout, which will take place over months, if not years. According to NACCHO's 2019 Profile of Local Health Departments, 88% of local health departments provide direct clinical immunization services to both adults and children.<sup>i</sup> **Local health departments need to be included as key stakeholders in the strategy and planning process for vaccine distribution—and as sites to distribute vaccinations.**
- Federal funding needs to get down to the local level, especially to make sure that the vaccine is delivered to hard-to-reach populations and that we combat vaccine hesitancy.

**Thank you for your past support of emergency preparedness and COVID response efforts.** As you are aware, Congress has appropriated billions of dollars for COVID response to state and local health departments. Because many communities, including mine, are dependent on states to pass through federal dollars, there are vast inconsistencies across the country with federal funds making it to local health departments to support this response. **{Here you should talk about how funding plays out in your state}**

### Sustainable Public Health Investment

Local health departments have critical roles in working with health care providers and other vaccinators, community-based organizations, and other partners to leverage trusted relationships with the public and deliver accurate, culturally appropriate messages about the safety and importance of getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

- Investments are needed to ensure that we can build out this level of vaccine infrastructure and track all the necessary information about vaccine administration to identify any safety problems and ensure people receive the necessary doses of vaccine within the recommended timeline. Improved data systems at the federal and state level must be mirrored at the local level for the entire system to be effective.
- The federal government must engage with public health and health care leaders to ensure clear, consistent messages about vaccine safety and efficacy and combat misinformation. Local health departments are particularly well positioned to inform and employ data-driven efforts that address vaccine hesitancy, combat misinformation, and increase confidence across all

populations, as they work closely with them at the local level, acting as liaisons to the unique populations they serve.

- Sustained funding from the Federal government would work to overcome the boom-and-bust cycles of spending in public health, creating a cyclical pattern of responding to health emergencies, but failing to prepare for the next one. Sustained and increased funding to public health would help to keep our communities safe, and local health departments equipped with the necessary resources to prepare for and respond to health emergencies.
  - NACCHO supports Sen. Patty Murray's (D-WA) "[Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act,](#)" that would provide \$4.5 billion annually in FY2025 and beyond for CDC grants for local, state, tribal and territorial health departments to address core infrastructure needs and public health accreditation programs.
- **Would you {your boss} be interested in becoming an original co-sponsor of this legislation?**

### Workforce

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for sustained workforce capacity in local health departments like mine. Since 2008, local health departments have lost more than 20% of their workforce capacity, meaning that we started the pandemic with fewer trained staff and have had to pull individuals away from other pressing public health challenges, like the opioid crisis, in order to do this work.
- Local protocols and mask mandates have politicized the COVID response, resulting in hundreds of public health officials resigning, quitting, or fired.
- We will need a strong workforce now and into the future in order to get through the pandemic and be better prepared for the next crisis and do the critical work of public health every day in between.
- We need strong, sustainable funding to grow our workforce, but we also need help recruiting top talent and retaining them in the system, by creating incentives such as loan forgiveness.
- NACCHO supports bipartisan legislation, introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress by Rep. Crow (D-CO) (HR 3297) in the House alongside Reps. Dr. Michael Burgess (R-TX), Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Chair Anna Eshoo (D-CA), and Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Ranking Member Brett Guthrie (R-KY).
  - a. In the Senate, Sen. Smith (D-MN) is looking for original cosponsors to create a recruitment mechanism for governmental public health like the successful National Health Service Corps.
  - b. The bills would create a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve three years in a local, state, or tribal health department. This is important to recruiting new staff and retaining the staff that we currently have. We are also looking for ways to secure the program via being included in the FY22 Appropriations process.
    - **Would you {your boss} be interested in becoming a co-sponsor of this legislation?**
    - **NACCHO has requested a \$200 million appropriation in funding for this program in his/her FY22 appropriations requests. We hope you {your boss} can be supportive of that request.**

Thank you for your time today. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time you have questions or need additional information.

**Background information:**

[COVID-19 Infographic](#)

[Public Health Workforce](#)

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<sup>i</sup> NACCHO. 2019 Profile of Local Health Departments. Retrieved September 29, 2020 from <https://www.naccho.org/resources/lhd-research/national-profile-of-local-health-departments>.