



16- 02

## **STATEMENT OF POLICY**

### **Community Health Strategist**

#### **Policy**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is committed to supporting an efficient and adaptable, 21st century health system in the United States that results in optimal health for all and places its highest priority on health, equity, and security for all people.

In this evolving health system, NACCHO encourages local health departments to take on or continue the role of community health strategist. The community health strategist role includes recognition that better health means addressing issues outside of medical care to address social determinants of health and promotion of health equity. In this role, local health departments have acquired new functions and have advanced current roles to prevent death, disease, and disability; address emerging threats to health, security, and equity; and mitigate the social and structural injustices that result in health disparities.

NACCHO supports local health departments working as community health strategists to address the growing gap between the expansion of healthcare services and the achievement of health among individuals and communities. This role underscores the need for sustained leadership at the community level to bring together community stakeholders to identify the needs of the community and to leverage resources to build integrated systems to achieve health equity. Local health departments are uniquely positioned to fill this role through their experience in providing essential services and leadership, engaging communities to identify and support policy solutions, responding to public health emergencies, and collecting, analyzing, and sharing data. NACCHO encourages local health departments to continue in the role of community health strategist to fulfill the foundational capabilities.<sup>1</sup> This requires LHD leaders to convene stakeholders from both private and public sectors to move public health priorities toward the Public Health 3.0 model.<sup>2</sup> The community health strategist role includes recognition that better health means addressing issues outside of medical care. Local health departments functioning as community health strategists must impact issues that have less to do with microbes and bacteria, and more around advancing strategies to address social determinants of health and promotion of health equity.

#### **Justification**

The U.S. is one of the least-healthy developed nations in the world<sup>3</sup> and spends at least twice as much on healthcare per person than other industrialized countries. Health outcomes are much poorer than should be expected for the money invested. The low global health status rankings and the inferior return on investment of healthcare dollars in the U.S. are compelling reasons to transform our approach to healthcare. The U.S. experiences a separation between the

medical care system, which primarily cares for sick individuals, and the public health system, which is concerned primarily with disease prevention and health promotion. The former has grown ever costlier, while the latter has eroded due to lack of public financing and support.

In 2014, RESOLVE published a report, *The High Achieving Governmental Health Department in 2020 as the Community Chief Health Strategist*.<sup>1</sup> This report calls on governmental public health to take on the role of the community's health strategist, and to acquire new skills and tasks in order to fulfill key public health functions while evolving in light of the nation's changing health landscape. The report highlights the necessity for governmental health to adapt in an evolving health system, including changes in healthcare needs, demographic shifts, and implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), which was signed into law in March 2010. The report also details key roles for governmental public health to adapt as community health strategists, such as promoting health and wellness for all people in the community, collecting and sharing data related to the health of the community,<sup>4</sup> assessing workforce needs,<sup>5,6</sup> and collaborating with a range of community partners to build an integrated and effective system that leads to healthier communities.<sup>7</sup>

Health is influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including individual health behaviors, social characteristics, and physical environment. Local health departments functioning as community health strategists play an important role in addressing the broader influences of health to promote health, eliminate health disparities, and promote health equity among all individuals in their communities.<sup>8,9</sup>

## **References**

1. RESOLVE. (2014). *The High Achieving Governmental Health Department in 2020 as the Community Chief Health Strategist*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE.
2. Prev Chronic Dis. (2017). *Public Health 3.0: A Call to Action for Public Health to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century*.
3. National Research Council & Institute of Medicine. (2013). *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
4. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2024). Statement of Policy: [Standards-Based Data Exchange Between Public Health and Healthcare](#)
5. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2021). Statement of Policy: [Local Public Health Workforce Development](#)
6. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2024). *2022 National Profile of Local Health Departments*. Washington, DC: National Association of County and City Health Officials.
7. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2024). *The Changing Public Health Landscape: Findings from the 2023 Forces of Change Survey*. Washington, DC: National Association of County and City Health Officials.
8. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2022). Statement of Policy: [05-02-Health-Equity-and-Social-Justice.pdf](#)
9. National Association of County and City Health Officials (2016) Public Health 3.0 Issue Brief: [NACCHO-PH-3.0-Issue-Brief-2016.pdf](#)

## **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Public Health Transformation Workgroup*

*Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors February 24, 2016*

*Updated October 2019*

*Updated December 2021*

*Updated September 2024*