



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NACCHO Urges Support for Frontline Public Health Workers

— *Public health professionals are essential employees whose work is critical to slowing the spread of disease and helping to reopen our communities.* —

Washington, DC, May 4, 2020 — The [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO), on behalf of the nation’s 3,000 local health departments, sent a letter to Congress highlighting the key role of health department staff on the front lines of the COVID-19 response and urging that they be recognized for their essential service.

The full letter can be found [here](#).

As we face the most challenging public health test of a lifetime, local health departments are leading on the front lines of the response. Just like grocery store employees, public transportation workers, and healthcare professionals working countless hours in hospitals and primary care settings, public health professionals are essential employees whose work is critical to slowing the spread of disease and helping to reopen our communities. They do so while working extended shifts, often without access to sufficient personal protective equipment, putting themselves—and their families—at risk to protect the lives of others. As you design policies to support essential workers, local health department staff should be front of mind and eligible for this assistance, including access to extra “hazard pay” included in any future coronavirus response bill.

Public health professionals at local health departments in cities and counties across the nation are equally at risk as other workers on the front lines. Local health departments work to protect the public and ensure critical needs are met in their communities. Examples of such activities include establishing drive through testing sites, creating temporary isolation sites, and interviewing infected individuals to complete contact tracing activities. Beyond their active roles in the COVID-19 response, local health department workers continue to provide other essential services to their communities, including distributing food and essential supplies to vulnerable families through the Special Supplemental

Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, providing sexually-transmitted disease testing and treatment on a prioritized basis, and offering limited syringe services programs to slow the spread of infectious disease related to drug use.

In order to complete these essential and live-saving activities, local health departments need to maintain a robust workforce. Unfortunately, local health departments and governmental public health have been underfunded for years. The local and state public health workforce across the United States has been cut by nearly 25 percent since 2008. Projections suggest that nearly half of the local and state health department workforce might leave in coming years. That means that they need to do more work with fewer people, leading to extended shifts and increased potential exposure to the virus. For example, recently at the Toledo, OH/Lucas Co. Health Department, the health department had to be closed down and outbreak response halted temporarily because so many employees had come down with COVID-19, likely contracted in the course of their daily work to serve the public. Any reduction in services provided to the public comes with a cost to people's health in this time of crisis.

In order to protect the public from COVID-19 and all other public health threats, local health departments need to be supported in their efforts. In order to sustain the public health workforce, public health professionals should be included in any hazard pay or similar effort to recognize and support frontline workers in the COVID-19 response.

NACCHO and local health departments look forward to continuing to work with Congress to address this global pandemic and shore up the public health system here at home so that Americans are protected from all public health threats.

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About NACCHO

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. For more information about NACCHO, please visit www.naccho.org