

16-02

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Community Health Strategist

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is committed to building a transformed, 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 new and evolving health system, NACCHO encourages local health departments to take on the role of community health strategist. In this role, local health departments would acquire new functions and advance current roles to prevent death, disease, and disability; address emerging threats to health, security, and equity; and eliminate the social and structural injustices that result in health disparities.

NACCHO supports local health departments in adopting the role of community health strategist to address the growing gap between the expansion of healthcare services and the achievement of health among individuals and communities. The adoption of this role underscores the need for new and 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, and collecting, analyzing, and sharing data.

In alignment with the Foundational Public Health Services, NACCHO encourages local health departments to adopt the role of community health strategist to fulfill the foundational capabilities, including the following:<sup>1</sup>

- Combat the leading causes of illness and disability;
- Assess emerging health needs to improve community health;
- Monitor and address the needs of priority populations in the community;
- Address health equity, racial equity, the social determinants of health, and social justice;
- Enhance information technology capacity to gather, analyze, and share real-time data sources;
- Assess workforce needs to equip personnel with new and relevant skills;
- Leverage public and private financing mechanisms to diversify the funding base;
- Integrate the resources and expertise of public health, healthcare, mental/behavioral health, social services, and all private and public sector entities that influence health outcomes;
- Assess the need for the provision of clinical care services in consultation with their community partners and governing boards, and adapt clinical services with attention to



the particular needs of the community and the local environment to support a community-first approach; and

- Participate in the planning, development, and implementation of health reform locally.

The community health strategist role includes a growing recognition that better health will mean addressing issues outside of medical care. The community health strategist must have an impact on 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 and spends at least twice as much on healthcare per person than other industrialized countries.<sup>2</sup> 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</sup> and collaborating with a range of community partners to build an integrated and effective system that leads to healthier communities.

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>9</sup>

### **References**

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4. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2012). Statement of Policy: [Electronic Health Records, Health Information Exchange, and Interoperability for Local Health Departments](#)

5. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2014). Statement of Policy: [Local Public Health Workforce Development](#)
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7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). *The Public Health System and the 10 Essential Public Health Services*. Atlanta, GA; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
8. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2014). *The Changing Public Health Landscape: Findings from the 2015 Forces of Change Survey*. Washington, DC: National Association of County and City Health Officials.
9. National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2015). Statement of Policy: [Health Equity and Social Justice](#).

### **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Public Health Transformation Workgroup*

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