



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

For Immediate Release

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NACCHO Sends Letter to House Oversight Committee Highlighting Public Health Effects of Climate Change

Local health departments play important role in addressing, mitigating public health effects of climate change, but resource gaps persist

Washington, DC, April 30, 2019 — Today, the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](http://www.naccho.org) (NACCHO), the voice of the nation’s nearly 3,000 local health departments, submitted a letter to the House Subcommittee on Environment of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform about the important role that local health departments can play in addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change, as well as the barriers to these efforts. The letter was sent in conjunction with the subcommittee’s hearing, entitled “Climate Change, Part II: The Public Health Effects.”

“Across the country, local health departments are tasked with addressing the many health risks that stem from climate change,” said NACCHO Chief Executive Officer Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA. “As the climate continues to change communities will be susceptible to a number of health threats, including increased exposure to and geographic reach of vector-borne and infectious diseases like zika and Lyme disease, exacerbation of respiratory conditions and allergies due to worsening air quality and pollution levels, food shortages, and lack of access to safe drinking water. Similarly, the increasing frequency and intensity of adverse weather event, like floods and wildfires, or natural disasters like hurricanes pose unique public health threats to the communities affected.”

Surveys conducted by NACCHO have found that nearly eight out of ten local health department directors believe their local health department lacks the expertise to assess the potential impacts of climate change and effectively create adaptation plans to respond to climate change. While more than half of health department directors acknowledge the health impacts of climate change, less than 20% (one-fifth) have the resources and expertise needed to assess the potential impacts, create effective plans, and protect their community from these health impacts.

Full text of the [letter](#) follows:

April 30, 2019

Dear Chairman Rouda and Ranking Member Comer:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), representing the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country, I write to thank you for highlighting the impact of climate change on our nation's health through the hearing, "Climate Change, Part II: The Public Health Effects." Climate change has serious and far-reaching health implications for present and future generations. We appreciate your focus on this incredibly important issue.

Across the country, local health departments are tasked with addressing the many health risks that stem from climate change. As the climate continues to change communities will be susceptible to a number of health threats, including increased exposure to and geographic reach of vector-borne and infectious diseases like zika and Lyme disease, exacerbation of respiratory conditions and allergies due to worsening air quality and pollution levels, food shortages, and lack of access to safe drinking water. Similarly, the increasing frequency and intensity of adverse weather events, like floods and wildfires, or natural disasters like hurricanes pose unique public health threats to the communities affected.

With the necessary resources, local health departments are uniquely positioned to prepare for and respond to these health impacts and protect the public's health. For example, NACCHO, with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, offered a funding

opportunity to supplement local health departments' ongoing climate change and health adaptation initiatives. In January 2019, NACCHO awarded the Boston Public Health Commission and the Marquette County Health Department (MI) each with \$15,000 grants to use in climate and health projects through July 31, 2019. Boston will use the grant to support the translation and printing of extreme temperature resource guides to reach all intended populations, particularly non-English speakers who may be the most vulnerable, while Marquette County plans to develop a public health emergency response plan specifically addressing climate change-related localized flooding, which is predicted to increase in this rural locality.

However, many more communities need this type of support to effectively plan and act to address the public health effects of climate change. Unfortunately, while NACCHO surveys have consistently found that local health officials are concerned about climate change, few feel that they have the tools to address it in a comprehensive way. Nearly eight out of ten local health department directors believe their local health department lacks the expertise to assess the potential impacts of climate change and effectively create adaptation plans to respond to climate change. While more than half of health department directors acknowledge the health impacts of climate change, less than 20% (one-fifth) have the resources and expertise needed to assess the potential impacts, create effective plans, and protect their community from these health impacts.

NACCHO strongly urges all levels of government to collaborate with community stakeholders in preparation for and response to a changing global and local climate. Local health departments and the public health community can and should provide strong leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Thank you, again, for holding this important hearing. Please contact Eli Briggs, NACCHO Senior Director of Government Affairs at ebriggs@naccho.org or 202-507-4194 if you require additional information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA CEO

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About NACCHO

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local 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.