TACCHO: The Collective Voice for Local Health Departments

The Texas Association of City & County Health Officials (TACCHO) is the premier member organization of Texas local public health departments (LHDs). LHDs are governed by municipalities and/or county government and Boards of Health. TACCHO and members work in partnership with state and federal agencies to enhance state and local public health practice in Texas with the ultimate goal of improving the health of Texans living in their communities. TACCHO members provide local public health services to, and protect, over 80% of the Texas population. TACCHO members employ public health professionals, including specialists in epidemiology, environmental health, chronic and infectious diseases, men’s and women’s health, nurses, doctors and more. TACCHO members serve as the subject matter expert and resource on issues affecting local public health.

Local Health Departments conduct promotion, prevention and control activities in the community

- Public health is what society does collectively to assure the conditions for people to be healthy. It does this through three core functions of public health: Assessment, Policy Development and Assurance.¹
- Local health departments collect and analyze data to identify trends in population health status and threats to the community.
- Local health departments save lives by providing vaccinations against infectious diseases to adults and children, ensuring persons have access to clean water and safe food prepared and served by food vendors, and preventing injuries (providing bicycle helmets) and chronic diseases (reducing exposure to tobacco).

Local Health Departments conduct preparedness, prevention and response activities in the community

- LHDs develop plans, lead exercises and inform communities on preparing and responding to potential emergencies and disasters.
- LHDs inform on, and implement community and clinical programs, to prevent and control infectious and chronic diseases.
- LHDs rapidly detect, inform and act to lead the community to protect the public’s health during an environmental or man-made emergency or disaster.

¹The future of public health/ Committee for the Study of the Future of Public Health, Division of Healthcare Services, Institute of Medicine, Publication: IOM: 88-02
Strengthening Texas through Strong Local Health Departments

- Local Health Departments (LHDs) are the lead public health strategist in their communities. They work closely with stakeholders to assess the conditions that threaten the public’s health, plan and implement policies and programs, and evaluate the affect those programs and policies have in improving the population’s health. TACCHO has identified three major focus points, based on national goals, that are essential to providing a stable and responsive local public health department:
  - Strengthen the local governmental public health system
  - Prepare and quickly respond to public health emergencies and threats
  - Improve health for all Texans

Strengthening the Local Governmental Public Health System

- LHDs use a combination of local, state, federal and other funding sources to create and maintain the infrastructure needed to serve as the lead public health strategist. It is important that state and federal funding be continued and moved quickly and easily to local health departments (LHDS) to ensure the population has access to services in a timely manner.
  - LHDs either rely solely or use additional, flexible funding allocated from the state health department, such as the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, to create or expand local programs that screen for and treat chronic and infectious diseases, mental health, vector control and management, food safety, public health emergencies and more.
  - Loss of federal and state funding means less services to the community and increased chances for disease outbreaks and reduced response to contain the spread of illness among the population.

Preparing and Responding to Public Health Emergencies and Threats

- LHDs maintain a constant readiness to respond to natural and man-made disasters that threaten the health and well-being of their population. Working with stakeholders, LHDs plan and conduct exercises to role play the roles and responsibilities of the response system during a public health emergency event.
  - LHDs either rely solely on or use additional state appropriations and/or federal funding (via the state health department or directly to the LHD) to augment planning and response to threats.
  - LHDs need continued and increased funding to conduct preparedness drills and exercises in advance of an emergency; to staff emergency shelters and provide medical and public health services during and after the event, to conduct environmental and vector control services that ensure the safety of the food supply and prevent spread of vector borne diseases via mosquitoes, rats and other animals.

Improving Health for all Texans

- LHDs recognize that many factors affect the health of a population, including education, environment, housing, transportation, jobs and more. By working collaboratively and collectively with other private and non-profit entities, those factors can be considered during the planning and implementation of local programs and policies.
  - LHDs use the Medicaid 1115 Waiver funds to maintain local programs to screen, treat and followup on chronic and infectious diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, TB and STDs.

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The mission of TACCHO is to strengthen and improve local public health practice in Texas through Leadership, Education, Advocacy and Development.