NALBOH NEWSBRIEF
A Publication of the National Association of Local Boards of Health

Raising Community Awareness of Food Safety and Other Environmental Health Issues

Also Inside:
Determining How Much to Spend on Tobacco Control Programs, Expanding the Field of Public Health Law, New Tools and Resources, and more

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Do You Know How Much Your Health Department Should Spend on Its Tobacco Program?

As your board of health works to set the local health budget for the coming fiscal year, are you sure you are putting your money where it is most effective? Has your board of health taken the necessary steps to measure your community’s health needs and established local health priorities? Based upon results from NALBOH’s 2008 National Profile of Local Boards of Health, if your board is unsure, you may not be alone. Results from the national profile demonstrated that approximately 2 out of every 3 responding boards have “some need” or “a lot of need” for education, training, and technical assistance on conducting community health assessments (61%) and establishing community health priorities (65%). Without these two activities, it will remain difficult for your board of health to be 100% confident it has budgeted the proper resources for tobacco programs. However, help is available. An updated tool from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) can assist your board and help it to gain confidence that if your community needs to reduce tobacco use, you are spending the recommended amount of money on your local tobacco control program.

The updated tool from NACCHO, Program and Funding Guidelines for Comprehensive Local Tobacco Control Programs, is designed for local health departments and the governing bodies to allocate tobacco control program funding at recommended levels. NACCHO describes the tool as providing a foundation on which local health department staff can build and structure their local tobacco control efforts; discussing how and where to allocate budget monies to establish best practice programs; and developing an outline that boards of health can use to advocate for local allocation of Master Settlement Agreement monies.

Features of the tool include a detailed publication and interactive spreadsheet. Both components can be downloaded from NACCHO’s website for free with a visitor log-in. Although both documents are essential to health members, for purposes of ensuring that budget monies are properly allocated, the spreadsheet may be the most beneficial. The spreadsheet allows a board of health to choose any county in the United States and see the recommended tobacco program funding levels. There is also a place for your board to enter its current budget allotment for tobacco control programs. The final document will help your board of health be more confident that it has budgeted money where the community may need it most.

To download your copy of the tools, please visit www.naccho.org/toolbox/tool.cfm?id=1994. Hands-on training and technical assistance for utilizing this tool is also available. To learn more, please contact Tricia Valasek at tricia@nalboh.org or (419) 353-7714.

Expanding the Field of Public Health Law and Redefining the Unacceptable

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The renowned social scientist Sir Geoffrey Vickers once described the history of public health as “the constant redefinition of the unacceptable.” Sir Geoffrey was a twentieth century student of the human condition, whose works have had a deep impact on our view of systems analysis and decision making. He recognized the challenges we face in redefining norms and standards, and saw our acceptance of these challenges as part of what makes us human. A lawyer by training, Sir Geoffrey was keenly aware that we have many choices in the way we deal with conventions. In explaining our approach to problems, he drew a famous analogy between the lobster trap which creatures enter but cannot leave and thinking traps into which people fall: “A trap is a trap only for the creatures which cannot solve the problem it sets. Man traps are dangerous only in relation to the limitations of what men can see and value and do.”

Those of us in public health know that public health policies often tackle hard problems by upsetting established conventions. The most effective policies are guided by evidence-based science and actively promote and protect the health of our communities. Yet policy implementation also requires the ability to balance tough choices between the common good and private rights, and the authority and flexibility to craft the best possible policy solutions based on the needs of all members of a community. Unfortunately, limited access to legal and policy experts often hampers public health practitioners, including local board of health members, who need practical legal and regulatory means to apply public health policies.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has recently announced a national initiative to develop a network of lawyers, public health practitioners, and researchers to help communities and states assess, design, and implement laws that can improve health and the public health system. The Foundation has asked the Public Health Law Center, home of the national Tobacco Control Legal Consortium, to help build this network and serve as its national coordinating center when the network opens its doors later this year. The work will be led by Dan Stier, a nationally respected public health lawyer, whose most recent position was Senior Public Health Analyst at the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, after serving many years as Chief Legal Counsel at the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services. The project will also be led by former Minnesota Assistant Attorney General Doug Blanke, director of the Public Health Law Center.

A national network of public health leaders in law and policy will expand the field of public health law and allow the public health community to strengthen the use of regulatory, legal, and policy solutions that improve public health. This collaborative initiative will provide the public health community with the legal and policy resources to preserve, promote, and protect public health and, in Sir Geoffrey’s memorable phrase, continue to “redefine the unacceptable.”

Additional information about the new public health law network can be found on the Public Health Law Center’s website at www.publichealthlawcenter.org.