

Executive Summary

Local health departments have an opportunity to play a vital role in shifting the health system towards a more population-based approach. But the ability of local health departments to do this requires they have the capacity and capabilities to undertake population health work. After working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the population health-focused fellowship program Project SHINE for several years, NACCHO sought to continue population health capacity-building efforts for LHDs by developing a population health assessment and toolkit project. The goal of this project was to better understand the workforce components needed for local health departments (LHDs) to achieve population health improvement outcomes within their communities, so that resources can be curated or developed to address these needs. Specifically, NACCHO wanted to better understand the capacity needs of local health departments to access appropriate data needed for assessment, community partnerships, and the social determinants of health, as these are the three critical areas necessary to engage in population health work.

The population health assessment aims to better understand agency-level gaps of small-to-medium LHDs as it relates to supporting population health programs, policies, and services. To uncover these gaps, NACCHO conducted a three-part qualitative analysis. First, NACCHO completed a scan of the literature, competencies, and best practices on population health at local health departments. Using this information, an interview guide was developed. A small focus group was then conducted to review the completeness and effectiveness of the questions in the interview guide. After including the feedback from the focus group, the interview guide was revised and used in the interviews of 11 key informant participants. The interviews were then transcribed and coded for analysis purposes.

The 11 participants represented diverse jurisdiction sizes as well as geographic locations. All participants were NACCHO members that are PHAB accredited and serve a population size of less than 500,000; representing 94% of NACCHO's members.¹ The interviews explored the local health department's experience with the social determinants of health, epidemiology and surveillance, and partnerships as they relate to population health. The results of these interviews revealed four main areas of focus for local health departments in doing population health work: building a culture of population health, tapping into external resources, developing staff capacity, and leading the population health movement in the community. In the associated companion piece, *The Road to Population Health*, these themes are accompanied by specific tips and recommendations from the key informants that are designed to build a foundation of action steps on the path toward improving population health.

¹ http://nacchoprofilestudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ProfileReport_Aug2017_final.pdf Accessed Oct, 2017