

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists Position Statement

03-EC-02

Committee: Executive

Title: Support for Workforce Development in Applied Epidemiology

Statement of the Problem:

Workforce development in applied epidemiology at the state and local levels is central to strengthening public health infrastructure. Although organizations of public health professionals have stressed the urgent need for additional epidemiologic capacity at the state and local levels, little progress has been made towards retaining new epidemiologists or providing existing epidemiologists with essential training and skills. Recent demands related to bioterrorism preparedness have further intensified the workforce capacity needs of public health agencies. This need will be satisfied by training programs designed to complement academic preparation for epidemiology that involve mentorship by experienced public health workers and practical experience. Currently, several programs are in place that provides workforce development in applied epidemiology, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Epidemic Intelligence Service. However, no training program exists that is specifically aimed at developing the state and local level epidemiology workforce; uses the mentorship model for applied epidemiology training; and focuses on recent graduates with epidemiology backgrounds from schools of public health (Masters or Doctoral level).

Position to be adopted:

- CSTE recommends that federal agencies increase funding for workforce development training programs with a focus on applied epidemiologic training and skills.
- CSTE and federal agencies should actively seek the input of states with a wide variety of needs in future planning for workforce development.

Background/Justification:

Epidemiology provides the fundamental public health functions of monitoring health status, diagnosing and investigating health hazards, identifying innovative solutions to health problems, and evaluating the effectiveness of health services. It is essential that public health agencies have skilled epidemiologists to execute these tasks in order to maintain the nation's public health infrastructure.

According to the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) recent report, *The Future of Public Health in the 21st Century*, the importance of strengthening the public health workforce is paramount. This report highlighted the fact that the majority of government public health workers lack the appropriate education and training to adequately execute essential public health functions. Another recent IOM report on infectious disease prevention and control specifically stressed the importance of applied epidemiology training programs designed to improve the nation's capacity to respond to microbial threats. In addition, recent needs assessment surveys conducted by Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) found that trained epidemiologists are lacking from the current public health workforce.

Currently, state epidemiology programs receive approximately 61% of their funding from the federal government. Given that, it is essential that federal agencies support programs designed to train public health professionals working in epidemiology at the state level. Traditionally, the CDC has been the leader for promoting public health training programs in states, but other federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Agriculture, have a vested interest in maintaining a capable workforce of epidemiologists and should contribute to the support of applied epidemiology training programs.

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