

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists Position Statement

04-EC-03

Committee: **Executive**

Title: **National Epidemiologist Awareness Day**

Statement of the Problem:

An epidemiologist is a person who prevents, investigates, and controls infectious diseases, injuries, chronic illnesses and other health related conditions and events in populations. While the efforts of epidemiologists to prevent and control disease by ensuring pathogen free foods, sterile hospitals, clean water, and unpolluted air are expected, people are largely unfamiliar with the practice of epidemiology or the skills and discipline required by an epidemiologist. In addition, public health is a field often taken for granted and subsequently goes unnoticed until it is missing or lacking.

Epidemiologists have diverse roles in protecting human health from their positions within state and local health departments, universities, federal agencies, professional organizations and private companies. Furthermore, the vast scope and depth of responsibility of these 'disease detectives' require a collaborative effort with other professionals such as physicians, policy makers, and law enforcement officials.

State and local health department epidemiologists are most often recognized for protecting the public's health against infectious disease outbreaks. However these front-line epidemiologists are also essential in protecting against non-infectious health problems. For example, they study and identify trends in injury and chronic diseases, monitor newborn health, protect the nation's workforce and identify longterm trends in important health related issues such as obesity. Epidemiologists at academic universities are responsible for researching public health problems and identifying both the risk factors that lead to adverse health outcomes as well as interventions that lead to positive health outcomes. Research information gathered and analyzed by these epidemiologists provide detailed information on how to prevent adverse health outcomes such as birth defects and injuries. Epidemiologists in federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are fundamental to the foundation of the field. Their leadership and guidance are essential in the development and evaluation of public health policy as well as providing expertise to the nation in health issues. Epidemiologists are also located within research laboratories. These epidemiologists may develop vaccines to prevent disease or risk their lives by studying the characteristics of deadly viruses and bacteria. The important responsibilities of all epidemiologists are essential in recognizing issues that directly affect health and the well being of people throughout the world.

Statement of the desired action(s) to be taken:

In an effort to better acquaint the public with dedicated epidemiologists, CSTE recommends designating one day per year as a national recognition day for epidemiologists and calls upon the organizations listed below to partner in support of a National Epidemiologist Awareness Day:

- Food and Drug Administration
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- National Institutes of Health
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
- National Association of County and City Health Officials
- Association of Schools of Public Health
- National Governors' Association

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Public Health Impact:

Most state and territorial health departments have insufficient epidemiology staff and resources¹. In addition, in the next few years, many epidemiologists in all sectors, including federal and state health agencies, and academic institutions will be eligible to retire. Because of these issues, there are concerns regarding the adequacy of the epidemiology workforce in the future. A National Epidemiologist Awareness Day would provide the needed awareness to the field of epidemiology. Consequently, this awareness will potentially result in:

- An increase in the number of students who attend Schools of Public Health
- An increase in the number of epidemiologists who enter the workforce
- An increase in demand for public health workforce training in epidemiology
- An increase in public health funding due to heightened awareness of the importance of epidemiology

Epidemiologists deserve recognition for the important responsibility of ensuring public health and educating individuals on how to prevent disease. A National Epidemiologist Awareness Day would show support for the individuals who are responsible for the public's health, ensuring quality of life and the protection of gains in life expectancy. Epidemiologists in the public, academic and private sectors will be rewarded for their contribution to the public's health and have their careers and professions elevated in the eyes of the public. Along with providing the recognition epidemiologists deserve, a National Epidemiologist Awareness Day will help ensure that a sufficient number of highly trained epidemiologists will be adequately prepared to continue to protect and defend human health in the future.

References:

1. Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE). *National Assessment of Epidemiologic Capacity Public Health Health: Findings and Recommendations*. 2003

Coordination:

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