Big City Health Departments Need More Disease Experts to Keep Americans Healthy and Safe

Epidemiologist
noun e-p·i·de·mi·ol·o·gist e -p- dē-mē- ˈä-l ˈ -jist
An expert scientist who studies, detects and tracks injuries and disease in our communities.

New survey of local health departments finds that the number of “disease detectives,” or epidemiologists, is far lower than needed to keep Americans healthy and safe.

The Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC) and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) recently assessed epidemiology capacity in 27 large urban health departments.* Epidemiologists in BCHC member cities serve on the front lines of public health, protecting more than 55 million, or 1-in-6, Americans. Big city “epis” not only respond to major health emergencies such as Zika and Ebola, but they also work to track chronic disease in communities like diabetes and cancer, and injury and violence related indicators, like motor vehicle crashes or gun-related homicides. Despite this important work, gaps remain. This survey finds that cities need additional staffing, funding, and training to fully protect the public’s health.

Big city epidemiologists keep Americans safe and healthy. If we don’t have enough of them, Americans are at risk. Epidemiologists track disease. They identify causes and factors associated with illness, including who is most at risk. They collect evidence and data. They rapidly implement response measures to control further spread of disease. A central tenant of government is keeping communities safe, and health departments can’t succeed in doing so if they don’t have the resources to predict and address health threats.

To learn more about how big city health departments are keeping Americans safe and healthy, visit bigcitieshealth.org.

* 27 of 30 BCHC member departments participated in the 2017 assessment. The information here represents the results from only those participating departments and their perceptions about capacity. Read the full report here: http://bit.ly/BCHCEpi
Nearly 1,100 epidemiologists work in big cities, protecting OVER 55 MILLION Americans.

More local dollars support big city epidemiology; more federal dollars support states.

In most city health departments epidemiologists work on:

- Infectious disease
- Maternal and child health
- Disaster preparedness
- Chronic disease
- Vital statistics
- Environmental health

Fewer have programs in:

- Mental health
- Substance abuse
- Injury prevention

THE BIG CITIES HEALTH COALITION (BCHC) is a forum for the leaders of America’s largest metropolitan health departments to exchange strategies and jointly address issues to promote and protect the health and safety of the 55 million people they serve. To learn more about how big city health departments are keeping America safe and healthy, visit: www.bigcitieshealth.org

THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL EPIDEMIOLOGISTS (CSTE) is the professional organization representing applied public health epidemiologists. CSTE works to foster effective relationships and provide technical advice and assistance to partner organizations. www.cste.org.