



State Public Health Vector Control Conference: Workforce and Disease Priorities Needs Assessment Summary

Seventy-four percent of SPHVCC survey respondents reported they did not have a sufficient number of public health workers to effectively staff their vector control units.

Background

The first case of West Nile Virus in the United States reported in New York in 1999 set in motion a chain of events that still has important implications for vector control programs today. State, territorial and local jurisdictions saw increased public attention, new streams of funding for surveillance activities and the enactment of more comprehensive mosquito control measures.

Now, eight years later, West Nile Virus funding cuts have impacted the states' and territories' ability to conduct comprehensive surveillance and respond to existing and emerging vector-borne diseases.¹ To gauge the current situation of workforce needs and priority issue areas, ASTHO compiled data in an online survey from the State Public Health Vector Control Conference (SPHVCC), which comprises the lead vector control expert from the health department of each state and territory. SPHVCC members from forty-two states responded during the survey period of June-July 2007. Each respondent considered how three major

components, workforce needs; opportunities and challenges; and climate change, affected his or her specific state.

Workforce Needs

ASTHO found that many respondents indicated that they do not have the necessary resources to effectively staff their vector control units. According to the survey:

- **66%** (n=21) of respondents said they lacked capacity for field-based surveillance and control teams
- **41%** (n=13) of those surveyed reported they lacked medical entomologists
- **41%** (n=13) of respondents commented that they lacked specialists in public health promotion and education
- **38%** (n=12) of those surveyed suggested that they lacked tick control and disease specialists
- **25%** (n=8) of respondents reported that they lacked epidemiological surveillance capacity

Although local jurisdictions represent the front line of defense in mosquito control efforts, states and territories are primarily tasked with carrying out surveillance activities and responding to emergency situations and natural disasters. In addition, states and territories serve as important sources for technical and laboratory assistance, funding, public education and the overall planning and coordination of mosquito control efforts between local jurisdictions. Workforce shortages can

¹ Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. *Impact of Reduced Funding for West Nile Virus*. 2007. Available at: <http://www.cste.org/pdffiles/2007/FinalWNVSummary.pdf>. Accessed 07-19-2007.

affect public health preparedness by limiting the capacity of states and territories to perform these critical functions.

Opportunities and Challenges

In the SPHVCC needs assessment, ASTHO found that many states are currently equipped to detect and respond to such diseases as West Nile Virus and rabies. However, many states expressed concerns that they lack the capacity to respond to emerging pathogens. Fourteen states (42% of respondents) listed inadequate surveillance capacity as one of the three most salient issues of concern for their vector control programs.

Sixteen states (38% of respondents) indicated that inadequate funding was the most challenging aspect of state vector control activities. Several states reported that they had no ability to conduct vector surveillance of any kind. Funds intended for the control of West Nile Virus originally helped states to develop more comprehensive vector surveillance programs. As one respondent reported, however, “when federal funds are redirected, it impacts our capacity for ALL vector-borne diseases.”

Climate Change

Eighty percent (80%) of respondents said that their agencies had undertaken no activity in regards to preparing for climate change and its effect on vector-borne diseases.

Nine states (20% of respondents) indicated that they had undertaken “limited activity” to prepare for climate change and its ensuing

effects on vector-borne diseases. No respondent reported that his or her state had enacted “extensive activity” on the subject.

The survey asked SPHVCC members how ASTHO could best help states prepare for vector control challenges posed by climate change. Twenty-two states (61%) replied that they would like ASTHO to help provide education and training on the issue of the effect of climate change on vector control issues.

Future Direction

ASTHO will use the results of this survey as guidance in the development and delivery of future products and services that more effectively meet the current needs of vector control specialists and more comprehensively address various vectors of public health concern. Given that many states expressed remarkable vector control experiences in response to the survey, ASTHO plans to provide information about promising practices and success stories to SPHVCC members. ASTHO will also pursue the possibility of holding a Health and Environment Electronic Seminar on the threats posed by the combination of workforce shortages and potential emerging vector-borne pathogens.

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The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) is the national nonprofit organization representing the state and territorial public health agencies of the United States, the U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia. ASTHO’s members, the chief health officials of these jurisdictions are dedicated to formulating and influencing sound public health policy, and to assuring excellence in state-based public health practice.

