

TITLE

The Profile of Maryland Environmental Health Practice

THEME

Foster Collaborations Among Health and the Environment

KEYWORDS

local capacity, infrastructure, workforce, local environmental health practice

BACKGROUND

In order to determine Maryland's capacity to ensure a healthy environment, the Profile of Maryland Environmental Public Health Practice project, an examination of local environmental public health capacities, needs, and future challenges, was initiated by the Johns Hopkins Center for Excellence in Community Environmental Health Practice.

OBJECTIVE(S)

To examine the existing environmental public health infrastructure capacities, identify agency needs, and quantify existing and future challenges to local environmental public health practice.

METHOD(S)

A quantitative and qualitative assessment process was carried out through the development of a comprehensive discussion guide and site visits to all 24 Maryland local health departments. Site visits were framed by the discussion guide, but allowed for free-form discussion and exchange of ideas with environmental health directors, sanitarians and support staff.

RESULT(S)

This Profile report provides a comprehensive review of county environmental public health practice through an examination of local environmental public health capacities, needs, and future challenges. There are seven major findings that reveal a fragile, neglected, fragmented, and under-funded environmental public health infrastructure. However, a dedicated and enthusiastic workforce offers a window of opportunity to enhance Maryland environmental public health protection efforts.

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION(S)

Key recommendations are matched to each major finding. They include: appointing a lead environmental public health authority; creating dedicated funding streams; statewide review of pay scales and advancement opportunities; building partnerships with academic and other organizations; creating an environmental public health council; and developing a coordinated, consistent statewide approach to environmental health practice.

As environmental public health threats continue to become more complex and as the current workforce's capacity is increasingly stretched, we must act now on the recommendations in this Profile to ensure the health and well being of Maryland for present and future generations.

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