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# Enhancing State and Local Roles in Food Safety

Local Health Officials Perspective

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## The view from the frontline:

- Recent NACCHO survey indicates that 78% of local food safety inspection activities are conducted by “inspectors” employed by local health departments.
  - These “inspectors” are generally part of an organization conducting many environmental public health activities and may be split between various programs.
  - Many of those inspectors interact with other public health disciplines.
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## More views:

- Authorities (legal ability to intervene at the local level) generally vested with appointed Boards of Health and/or Health Officers.
  - Considered a source of credible information regarding public health matters – food safety included
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Two main activities at the local level:

- **Routine Surveillance Activity  
(Inspection)**
  - **Response to Food-borne  
Illness**
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# Routine Surveillance Activity

- Develop a basis for ongoing response to the specific establishment
    - Menu (food types)
    - Food process techniques
    - Other Variables such as language barriers
  - Cross-sectional risk assessment of an establishment
    - Do they?
      - Understand safe food storage
      - Understand time-temperature relationships
      - Keep food source records
      - Others
  - Develop a relationship (hopefully positive) with food purveyors
    - Credibility
    - Communication channels
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# Response to Food-borne Illness

- ❑ Front-line practitioners
    - First to receive complaints (Env. health or nursing)
    - Rapid, multivariate approach generally employed in LHDs and necessary if State and Federal agencies are going to use their tools of investigation
      - ❑ Food, blood and stool samples
      - ❑ Case/contact investigation
      - ❑ Epidemiology - either conducted at the LHD level or packaged correctly for state and federal officials
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# Challenges

- Local resources generally don't cover the cost associated of a comprehensive surveillance and response program
  - State and local relationships are different throughout country – some don't have a relationship at all
  - Food Safety Network continues to lack “systemness”
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# Local Resources Lacking

- Environmental public health practitioners assigned to too many program activities
  - Assigned too many food service establishments. Some states only require one inspection per year
  - Performance standards if in place may not be met
  - Generally find the time to do the most pressing public health challenge – foodborne disease outbreak investigation/recall activities
  - No time allocated for internal training such as standardization or external training such as food handlers training
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## State – Local Relationships

- Support to local health department staff for training and enforcement activity may be deficient
  - Information not being funnel to local health department staff in a timely manner. Define roles and responsibilities clearly.
  - Training on epidemiological methods not readily available to local health department staff
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## A Food Safety Network:

- Understands the interrelatedness of the system
  - Understands they have collective responsibility
  - Understands that they share resources
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## How do we make it better?

- Educate Policymakers on the importance of enhancing the food safety network
  - Continue to understand and enhance the roles and responsibilities that local, state and federal partners play in food safety
  - Share Resources!
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