



PRESS RELEASE

FOOD SAFETY TOP OF THE LIST FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A survey of Western Australian local governments has identified that their highest public health priority is food safety, followed by sewerage, vector control and waste management.

The survey, which was conducted by the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA (PHAIWA) at Curtin University) obtained information from over 75 local governments throughout the state. It showed that Councils place less emphasis on broader public health issues such as obesity, reducing alcohol related harm and child health.

Dr Melissa Stoneham, Senior Research Fellow at PHAIWA said, "Local governments tackle a broad array of issues but they have great opportunities to increase the services they provide in areas such as obesity and injury. Environmental health services as we know them are based on the way we were in the nineteenth century. It is time to provide services that meet the needs of the twenty-first century."

The survey also showed that councils find it difficult to recruit and retain environmental health staff, particularly in rural and remote areas. 56% of Councils had difficulty recruiting Environmental Health Practitioners and 42% had difficulty retaining these professionals.

An unexpected finding from the survey was that 61% of Councils did not allocate any time for Indigenous health and 35% spent no time on health promotion. Dr Stoneham said, "Environmental health factors such as housing, personal hygiene, animal control and sanitation are vital to improving the health of Indigenous Australians, especially those living in rural and remote areas".

Mr Brendan Ingle, Manager of Environmental Health at the City of Mandurah commented that, "Most local governments recognise the importance of these broader current public health issues and try their best to influence them with the resources they have, but there are important behind the scenes public health activities that must continue to be completed through the direction of legislation.

Achieving these requirements will be a limiting factor for many local governments in the activities they can undertake”.

The survey showed that 22% of responding local governments had used non-government health organisations to assist with their public health work. Dr Stoneham said, “We are keen to see more partnerships between Councils and the non government sector, which has much expertise to contribute. The major problems in public and environmental health cannot be solved by individuals or organisations acting alone. We recognise the pressures facing local governments, which are often under-resourced. We hope that the findings of this survey will encourage them to work with others in the community in dealing with some of our most pressing health problems”.

PHAIWA has produced a series of fact sheets on working on health with local government. These are being provided to both NGOs and local governments around the State.

The full report is available on PHAIWA’s website at www.phaiwa.org.au.

Contacts: Dr Melissa Stoneham, Senior Research Fellow, Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA - 0421 113580 or m.stoneham@curtin.edu.au

Mr Brendan Ingle, Manager Environmental Health City of Mandurah
9550 3746 or Brendan.ingle@mandurah.wa.gov.au