cases of tickborne disease have more than doubled in the past 13 years and represent three quarters of all reported vectorborne disease cases in the U.S. Lyme disease alone accounted for over 80% of reported tickborne diseases (Rosenberg et al., 2018). Certain regions of the U.S. have been more greatly impacted than others. For example, reported cases of spotted fever rickettsiosis increased dramatically from 2016–2017, with New England, East North Central, and Middle Atlantic regions reporting a 215%, 78%, and 65% increase in cases, respectively. Similarly, reported cases of anaplasmosis increased by 39% (Heitman et al., 2019). Furthermore, tickborne diseases are emerging, including *Borrelia miyamotoi* disease, Bourbon virus disease, and Heartland virus disease (Rosenberg et al., 2018). Causing further alarm, the number of counties in the northeastern U.S. at high risk for Lyme disease has increased by more than 320% since the late 1990s (Kugeler, Farley, Forrester, & Mead, 2015).

The steadily increasing numbers of reported tickborne diseases in the U.S. have become a vexing public health issue, placing strain on state and local health departments (Rosenberg et al., 2018). Slightly more than half of all local health departments (LHDs) provide vector control services and a recent survey of the environmental health (EH) workforce shows that 38% of EH professionals reported working in vector control (Gerding et al., 2019; National Association of County and City Health Officials [NACCHO], 2016). In addition, a web-based review of vector control programs suggested that 39% of programs offering tick services were LHD vector control programs (Ruiz, Vanover, Parale, & Gerding, 2018).

Among EH departments interviewed, EH professionals were commonly involved in passive tick surveillance and community education and outreach but they were less likely to be involved in tick control and management (Figure 2). EH professionals utilized resources from CDC’s website, state health departments, and local universities to answer tick-related questions and they found it useful to partners both internally and externally for tick-related activities.
ships were leveraged for increased capacity to conduct tick-related activities such as public outreach, surveillance, control, and management. Additionally, EH professionals were aware of current and emerging tick issues in their jurisdiction and cited Lyme disease as a top concern. In contrast, some respondents cited that the public, upper-level management, including boards of health, and medical professionals were unaware that ticks are an issue in their communities.

EH professionals reported challenges that include a lack of direct funding and inadequate staffing for tick-related activities (see sidebar). While EH professionals face barriers to conducting tick-related activities, the respondents highlighted a few key opportunities for strengthening capacity or enhancing efforts:

- Conducting routine tick surveillance, even on a small scale, to establish baselines and provide insight into trends.
- Using a community health improvement plan to identify ticks as a priority for their communities and help justify resources for tick-related activities.
- Engaging constituents in the development of tick-related policy can provide understanding into community concerns and priorities.

The key informant interviews and subsequent report provide insight into the role of EH departments in tick-related activities and services, as well as the challenges they face. As tickborne diseases continue to grow and threaten the public’s health, communities might look to their local EH departments to provide resources and solutions. EH professionals should seek opportunities to strengthen tick-related services in order to meet the needs of their communities and protect public health.
EH professionals are encouraged to use available resources to enhance their knowledge of vectors, especially ticks, as well as strengthen their vector control programs. CDC and partners including NACCHO continue to support EH programs and professionals through the development of vector control tools and resources. Vector control resources for EH professionals can be found at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/vector-control.html. Information on ticks and tickborne diseases can be found at www.cdc.gov/ticks. More information about the interview results and recommendations presented in this column can be found within the full report available at www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Local_EH_Department_Tick_Activities_Final.pdf.

Corresponding Author: S. Kayleigh Hall, National Center for Environmental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4770 Buford Highway, MS S106-5, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717. E-mail: shall7@cdc.gov.

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