Keep Communities Healthy by Investing in the Public Health Workforce

The public health workforce – the backbone of our nation’s governmental public health system – is facing a crisis that predates COVID-19 but has worsened during the pandemic response. Public health departments were hit hard by the Great Recession: local and state health departments have lost more than 20% of their workforce since 2008, shedding over 50,000 jobs across the country. This deficiency is compounded by the age of the public health workforce — 55% of local public health professionals are over age 45, and almost a quarter of health department staff are eligible for retirement. Between those who plan to retire or pursue jobs in the private sector, projections suggest that nearly half of the local and state health department workforce might leave in coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic may hasten workforce shifts. Staff are burnt out after serving on the front lines of the pandemic response for two years. The politicization of the COVID-19 response has also taken a toll on the public health workforce and its leaders. On top of that, competition with the private sector, low pay, and geographic challenges contribute to difficulty recruiting new talent with key public health skills. Combined, these forces create an urgency to address our public health workforce crisis.

How Congress Can Help

COVID-19 has demonstrated the danger of not having the right people in place to prepare for and respond to an emergency. New staff are joining health departments to help protect the public during this pandemic. The public health system needs to retain these staff long term and help ensure that their experience is harnessed and available to address current and future public health challenges.

Current Legislation to Create a Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in both chambers of Congress to address the public health workforce crisis by creating a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve in a local, state, or tribal health department:

- **H.R. 3297**, the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Act - Reps. Crow (D-CO) and Burgess (R-TX). Staff contact: Daniel.Tsang@mail.house.gov
- **S. 3506**, the Strengthening the Public Health Workforce Act - Sens. Smith (D-MN) and Collins (R-ME). Staff contact: Kripa_Sreepada@smith.senate.gov
- The **PREVENT Pandemics Act** draft from Sens. Murray (D-WA) and Burr (R-NC) also includes the public health workforce loan repayment program

The loan repayment program would be open to individuals who have graduated within the past 10 years with a range of degrees vital to the needs of a 21st century public health workforce like public health, epidemiology, data systems, informatics, or statistics. The program is modeled off the success of the National Health Service Corps program, and would provide an important tool for health departments to recruit and retain top talent to tackle public health challenges today and in the future.
The public health workforce loan repayment program is supported by nearly 100 stakeholder groups including public health organizations, medical associations, academic organizations, labor, and consumer groups:

**Supporting Organizations**

3RNet - National Rural Recruitment & Retention Network  
AFSCME  
Allergy & Asthma Network  
Alliance for Aging Research  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments  
American Association for Clinical Chemistry  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American College of Clinical Pharmacy  
American College of Preventive Medicine  
American Dental Education Association  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Lung Association  
American Organization for Nursing Leadership  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Podiatric Medical Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene  
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research  
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology  
Association of Community Health Nursing Educators  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care  
Association of Public Health Laboratories  
Association of Public Health Nurses  
Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses  
Big Cities Health Coalition  
CAEER Coalition  
Coaliton of National Health Education Organizations  
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists  
Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations  
de Beaumont Foundation  
Eta Sigma Gamma  
Families USA  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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