

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: Peter.Trapp1@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.

Local, State, Tribal and Territorial Health Departments



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

CAEAR Coalition

Coalition 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

HIV Medicine Association
Immunization Action Coalition
Impetus - Let's Get Started LLC
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
Lakeshore Foundation
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NASTAD
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Local Boards of Health
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Association of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Black Nurses Association
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Consumers League
National Environmental Health Association
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Forum for Heart Disease & Stroke Prevention
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National WIC Association
Northwest Center for Public Health Practice
Prevent Blindness
Prevention Institute
Public Health Activities and Services Tracking project, University of Washington School of Nursing
Public Health Foundation
Rural Nurses Association
Safe States Alliance
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
School-Based Health Alliance
Society for Public Health Education
The AIDS Institute
The Gerontological Society of America
Trust for America's Health
University of Washington School of Nursing
University of Washington School of Public Health
Vaccinate Your Family

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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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