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.
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
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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