The public health workforce — the backbone of our nation’s governmental public health system — is facing a crisis that predates COVID-19 but worsened during the pandemic response. Public health departments were hit hard by the 2008 recession and despite some progress between 2016 and 2019, local health departments lost 21% of their workforce capacity in the decade before the pandemic.¹ A recent analysis found that local public health departments need at least 54,000 more full-time equivalent positions — an increase of 70% — to provide a minimum set of public health services.² That estimate encompasses only the bare minimum needed to sustain the public health system, without accounting for additional workforce that may be temporarily required to respond to an emergency like COVID-19.

The need to expand the local health department workforce is compounded by pressures that may lead existing workers to leave the field. A 2022 analysis found that nearly one-third of the public health workforce is considering leaving their organization in the next year, mostly for reasons other than retirement, including pay, work overload and burnout, lack of opportunities for advancement, stress, and organizational climate and culture.³ Combined, these forces create an urgency to address our public health workforce crisis by better supporting existing staff and bringing new staff into the field.

### Congress Can Help

Congress recognized the challenges facing the public health workforce and included bipartisan legislation in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 to establish a Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program that will offer up to $150,000 in educational loan repayment program to public health professionals 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 successful National Health Service Corps program and will offer an important tool for health departments to recruit and retain top talent to tackle public health challenges today and in the future. However, the program cannot get off the ground without sufficient funding. **Congress can help by fully funding the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program in Fiscal Year 2024.**

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**Fully Fund the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program**

Congress passed bipartisan legislation last year to address the public health workforce crisis by creating a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve three years in a local, state, or tribal health department, but dedicated funding is needed. **Please support full funding of the program in Fiscal Year 2024.** An annual appropriation of $100 million could allow as many as 2,000 public health professionals to receive up to $50,000 in student loan repayment benefits, helping health departments to recruit and retain top talent.
Supporting Organizations

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:

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 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
References


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