

## Keep Communities Healthy by Investing in the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 organization-

al climate and culture.<sup>3</sup> 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.**

### 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  
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  
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

- <sup>i</sup> NACCHO, 2019 National Profile of Local Health Departments, [https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Public-Health-Infrastructure/NACCHO\\_2019\\_Profile\\_final.pdf](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Public-Health-Infrastructure/NACCHO_2019_Profile_final.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> de Beaumont Foundation and Public Health National Center for Innovations, Staffing Up: Investing in Public Health Workforce, <https://debeaumont.org/staffing-up/>
- <sup>iii</sup> de Beaumont Foundation, Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey, <https://debeaumont.org/phwins/2021-findings/>

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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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