

Keep Communities Healthy by Investing in the Public Health Workforce

The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, and state levels. Skilled professionals are the primary resource necessary to deliver public health programs and services: they lead efforts to ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. They prepare and respond to disasters like hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. And they are on the front lines of addressing complex and emerging issues, like the opioid crisis, the spread of novel coronavirus, and the re-emergence of vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

However, governmental public health was hit hard by the Great Recession, and whereas much of the rest of the public sector workforce has recovered or grown, local and state health departments have not. In fact, **local and state health departments have lost nearly a quarter (23%) 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**. At the same time, competition with the private sector, low pay, and geographic challenges contribute to difficulty recruiting new talent with key public health skills. Combined,

Local, State, Tribal and Territorial Health Departments



these forces indicate a public health workforce crisis that must be addressed.

The nation is positioned to make incredible progress in addressing long-standing public health problems, but **health departments need the people to make a difference**. And, as the healthcare system has moved rapidly into an electronic data environment, many public health professionals are not equipped with the technology or the skills to engage with these data systems. Public health is dependent on data to identify trends and target resources where they will have the greatest impact. Federal and state governments have invested heavily in healthcare systems that are able to share data, but these investments will not reach their full potential without public health professionals who can harness their potential to improve their communities.

Congress Can Help

No matter what the public health crisis or opportunity, we need the right people in place to act. That is why we must act to rebuild our public health workforce and prepare it for the future.

Therefore, the Public Health Workforce Coalition calls on Congress to take a first step to invest in the public health workforce, by enacting and implementing a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state, or tribal health department.

Such a program, modeled off the success of the National Health Service Corps in bringing healthcare providers to communities in need, will help health departments across the country recruit appropriate staff who can tackle 21st century challenges and increase health departments' capacity, now and in the future, to keep the public healthy and safe. This coalition complements the work of the [22x22 campaign](#) that will increase funds at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support public health programs that rely on the public health workforce.

While the public health workforce has been cut, serious public health challenges are on the rise:

- The deadliest flu season in a generation occurred in 2017–2018 with 80,000 deaths.
- 2019 saw 1,276 individual cases of measles in 31 states, the most since 1992.
- Syphilis and other STIs are skyrocketing with a 185% increase in congenital syphilis since 2014.
- Vaping among high schoolers has ballooned from 1.5% in 2011 to 27.5% in 2019, reversing the gains made in reducing youth smoking.



Is the workforce sustainable?

TURNOVER:

Health departments face a high rate of turnover. Nearly half of the workforce is considering leaving their organization in the next five years.



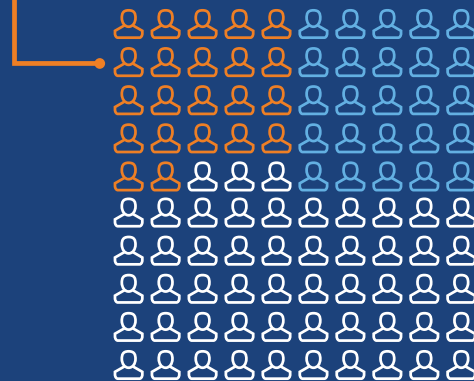
NEARLY HALF

of the workforce is considering leaving their organization in the next five years



22%
plan to retire in the next five years

25%
plan to leave in the next year for reasons other than retirement



Since 2014, there has been a **41%** increase in those planning to leave their organization

Source: Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey, 2017

Supporting Organizations

3RNet - National Rural Recruitment & Retention Network

Allergy & Asthma Network

Alliance for Aging Research

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine

American Association on Health and Disability

American College of Preventive Medicine

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 Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Nurses in AIDS Care

Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Public Health Nurses
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
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
de Beaumont Foundation
HIV Medicine Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Lakeshore Foundation
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Association of County and City Health Officials
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 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 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
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

For more information and to join the Coalition, please contact:

Data Sources:

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2. Leider JP, Coronado F, Beck AJ, Harper E. Reconciling Supply and Demand for State and Local Public Health Staff in an Era of Retiring Baby Boomers. Am J Prev Med. 2018;54(3):334-340.
3. 2016 National Profile of Local Health Departments
4. ASTHO Profile of State and Territorial Public Health, Volume 4.

NACCHO
National Association of County & City Health Officials
The National Connection for Local Public Health



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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