

# 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:

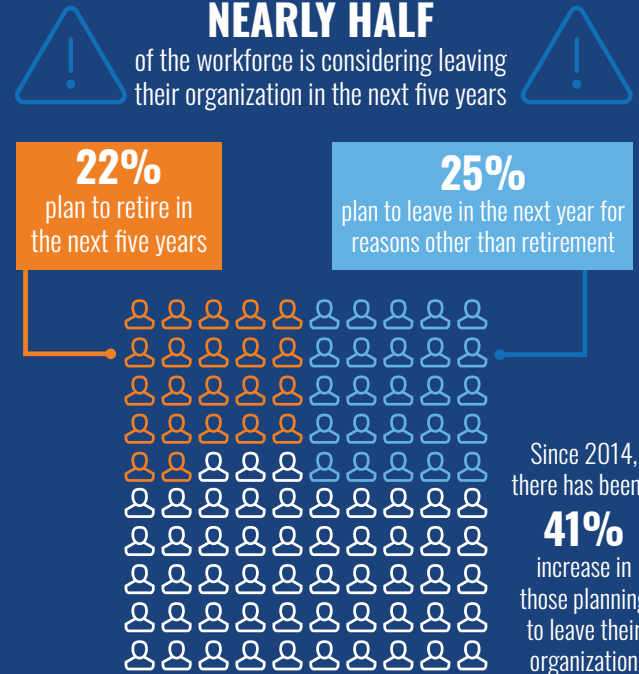
- The deadliest flu season in a generation occurred in 2017–2018 with 80,000 deaths.
- 2019 saw 1,276 individual cases of measles in 31 states, the most since 1992.
- Syphilis and other STIs are skyrocketing with a 185% increase in congenital syphilis since 2014.
- Vaping among high schoolers has ballooned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



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 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 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  
 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:**

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**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*



**Public Health**  
 Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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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