

05-08

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Public Health Nurses

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recognizes the importance of the public health nurse as a part of public health inter-professional practice. NACCHO also recognizes the challenges related to recruiting and retaining qualified public health nurses while also facing limitations in funding from the federal, state, and local government.

Public health agencies have experienced a reduction in their workforce capacity, including public health nurses. Staff totals for registered nurses have declined approximately 36% from an estimated 33,200 in 2008 to 21,200 in 2019.¹ This decrease negatively impacts existing public health services, and impairs effective responses to emerging public health priorities such as infectious and chronic diseases and improving population health outcomes.

NACCHO supports the following:

- Creation and funding of a loan repayment program for public health professionals, including nurses, serving in local, state, or tribal health departments;
- Increased federal funding for health professions training programs such as the National Health Service Corps and Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act;
- Increased federal funding to programs encouraging minorities and persons from underserved areas to enter into the health and nursing professions;
- Reduction of the debt burden for underrepresented individuals through loan forgiveness programs and tuition reimbursement strategies;
- Increased federal funding for traineeships that support Advanced Public Health Nursing (APHN) education;
- Integration of public health nursing rotations, including population-based clinical experiences, into nursing school curricula;
- Increased access to online training and degree programs;
- Promotion of public health nursing as a professional option, not simply a component of nursing curricula;
- Reduction of public health nursing faculty shortages in nursing education and increasing funding for education faculty specializing in population-based public health nursing;
- Funding for current Diploma and Associate Degree public health nurses to return to



school for completion of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), allowing them to increase their knowledge and skills in social determinants of health, leadership, and public health nursing practice;

- Pilot testing nurse residency programs to help with recruitment and retention of public health nurses;
- The Health Resources and Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state health departments, and universities increasing the availability of continuing education and professional development for public health nurses as a means of retaining and strengthening the local health department workforce through mechanisms such as online training, webcasts, and scholarships;
- Increased funding opportunities for evidence-based and outcomes research related to public health nursing practice and interventions;
- Promotion of nursing as a second degree to students with an existing college degree; and
- Parity in salaries for public health nurses and nurses in other areas of clinical practice.

NACCHO encourages local health departments to do the following:

- Provide nursing internship opportunities;
- Increase public health training opportunities for nursing professionals;
- Increase the availability of supplemental education for public health nurses as a means of retaining and strengthening the local health department workforce;
- Insist public health nurses practice to full scope of their license; and
- Partner with schools of nursing for student clinical experience, public health nursing staff continuing education, dissemination of evidence-based practice interventions for public health nurses, and joint research and evaluation projects to enhance the evidence base for public health nursing practice.

NACCHO will seek partnerships with local health departments and nursing organizations, such as the Association of Public Health Nursing, the Association of Community Health Nursing Educators or the Quad Council for Public Health Nursing in order to enhance the visibility of public health nursing and enhance public health nursing educational opportunities for practicing nurses and students.

Justification

Public health nursing is a specialty practice within nursing and public health. It focuses on improving population health by emphasizing prevention, and attending to multiple determinants of health. Often used interchangeably with community health nursing, this nursing practice includes advocacy, policy development, and planning, which addresses issues of social justice.²

Public health nurses focus on the health of populations and working with communities and the individuals and families who live within them. With an emphasis on prevention, their practice is multi-faceted and has resulted in positive health outcomes including community

emergency preparedness, reduction of communicable diseases, enhanced surveillance; higher rates of breastfeeding; reductions in pre-term births and low birth weight rates and improved behavior; education; and employment. The following statistics provide rationale for ensuring adequate quantity and quality of trained nurses at local health departments:

- Public health nurses employ practices grounded in social justice, driven by epidemiological evidence, and involving community collaboration.³
- Public health nurses comprise a large percentage of the entire local health department workforce—18% of all local health department staff in 2013. Ninety-four percent of local health departments employ public health nurses.⁴
- Many local health departments experience problems hiring professional occupations, including public health nurses. The most common reasons cited among local health departments for difficulty in hiring public health nurses include uncompetitive pay and difficulty in attracting candidates to geographic area.¹

References

1. NACCHO. (2020). NACCHO's 2019 Profile Study: Changes in Local Health Department Workforce and Finance Capacity Since 2008. Retrieved from <http://nacchoprofilestudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2019-Profile-Workforce-and-Finance-Capacity.pdf> on June 4, 2020.
2. American Public Health Association. The Definition and Practice of Public Health Nursing. A Statement of the APHA Public Health Nursing Section, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/memborgroups/phn/nursingdefinition.ashx> on June 4, 2020.
3. Minnesota Department of Health Center for Public Health Nursing. (2004). Cornerstones of Public Health Nursing. Retrieved June 4, 2020, from https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/practice/ta/phnconsultants/docs/0710phn_cornerstones.pdf.
4. NACCHO. (2016) National Profile of Local Health Departments. Retrieved from <http://nacchoprofilestudy.org/reports-publications/> on June 5, 2020.

Additional Resources:

Future of Nursing: Institute of Medicine. (2010). The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health. Retrieved from http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=12956&page=R1

Kulbok, P.A., Thatcher, E., Park, E., Meszaros, P.S. (May 31, 2012) "Evolving Public Health Nursing Roles: Focus on Community Participatory Health Promotion and Prevention" OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing Vol. 17, No. 2, Manuscript 1. Retrieved from <http://nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Vol-17-2012/No2-May-2012/Evolving-Public-Health-Nursing-Roles.html>

Record of Action

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