

# Oregon's Local Public Health Workforce Report, 2021

## Fact Sheet

Local public health departments have been underfunded for years, operating with shoestring budgets and overworked and underpaid staff. To learn more about these challenges, the Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials staff interviewed leaders at 30 local public health authorities (LPHAs) in the summer of 2021.

LPHAs leaders across Oregon shared that they have trouble recruiting qualified and diverse staff; offering competitive pay; and giving staff a supportive, growth-oriented work environment. Rural counties, in particular, have trouble hiring nurses and epidemiologists. LPHA staff are also burning out from the stress of covering multiple roles in their health departments and the stress of the COVID-19 response.

**Oregon's LPHAs need increased and consistent funding to develop and support a workforce that represents our communities and has the ability to provide essential services, reduce health inequities, and respond quickly to public health emergencies.**

[Read the full report on CLHO's website.](#)



## Staffing



- **1905** full-time equivalents (FTEs) work in Oregon's LPHAs.\*
- **22%** of these FTEs work in rural health departments.\*\*
- **40%** of these FTEs were hired after March 2020 for the COVID-19 response.
- Most smaller health departments do not have an epidemiologist on staff.
- LPHA leaders, especially in rural counties, said that it was challenging to find qualified and diverse people to apply for open jobs. Many recommended "home-growing" people from within their communities and accepting lived experience in place of education.

- The average starting wage for public health nurses across Oregon is **\$29.36/hour**\*\*\*
- Many LPHA leaders stated that county pay scales for public health nurses are not competitive with other local health care employers, particularly hospitals.
- LPHA leaders said that the low starting pay at health departments, especially for nurses, and drawn-out hiring processes discouraged people from applying for or accepting jobs.

## Compensation



## Training & Retention



- LPHA leaders across Oregon said that new staff with degrees in public health needed additional training for the on-the-ground public health work, such as building partnerships or implementing Public Health Modernization.
- LPHA leaders in rural counties said they have trouble finding people with a college education and must give basic public health training to new staff.
- LPHA staff often have to cover multiple roles across different programs and had to do so even more during the COVID-19 response. "Wearing multiple hats" like this has led to burnout among staff.
- LPHA leaders shared that county structures make it challenging for staff to move up, causing some promising public health professionals to leave.

## Recommendations

- Oregon's public health system needs sustained and flexible funding and incentives from the Oregon Legislature to build up and support the public health workforce.
- County governments should examine their hiring processes and minimum requirements for jobs to diversify and expand the applicant pool and should explore ways to increase wages for public health nurses.
- Academic partners should work with local public health officials to identify training needs and gaps in public health education and expand access to and options for public health credentials.

\*Does not include data from Lake, Union, Tillamook, or Josephine Counties  
\*\*All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number  
\*\*\*Does not include data from Lake, Union, Douglas, or Josephine Counties  
Note: All FTE and pay data are as of August 2021

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