



OREGON COALITION OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

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PRESS RELEASE: Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials Release Workforce Report Highlighting Challenges to Hiring Local Public Health Professionals

Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, local public health authorities struggle to get sustainable funding and support to hire and retain staff, report finds

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In recognition of [National Public Health Week April 4th-10th](#), sponsored by the American Public Health Association, the Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) is announcing the release of [Oregon's Local Public Health Workforce Report, 2021](#).

This report comes from interviews with local public health officials across Oregon and highlights the challenges in hiring public health professionals after years of underfunding public health and two years of responding to a pandemic.

“Public health is people-powered,” said CLHO’s Chair Jocelyn Warren in an introduction to the report. “All public health services require enough capable and qualified health professionals working at the local level...this report is an attempt to draw out, from all of the pain, struggle, confusion, and exhaustion of the last two years, some of the lessons learned about the public health system and what is needed to build a strong and sustainable workforce.”

A key finding of the report shows local public health authorities struggling to hire new staff, especially nurses, because they cannot offer competitive wages. For example, the average starting wage for a public health nurse in Oregon is just \$29.36 an hour, which many administrators did not consider competitive with local hospitals and clinics.

“Nurses can go to the hospital ICU and can make \$100 per hour,” Dr. Bob Dannenhoffer, Douglas County Health Administrator/Health Officer, estimated. “When a public health department offers \$27.30 an hour, they think we must have missed a digit.”

The report also highlights the challenges smaller and rural health departments face in hiring qualified professionals. For example, epidemiologists investigate the cause and the spread of diseases, work that is core to public health’s mission [to protect and promote the health of all people in all communities](#), but only two of the 13 local public health authorities serving under 50,000 people that participated in this report stated that they were able to hire epidemiologists.

Another key finding from the report is that the local public health workforce grew by 67% from March 2020 to August 2021 in response to the COVID pandemic. However, most local public health authorities do not have enough funding to keep this workforce that has been serving Oregon communities for the last 2 years.



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“Despite our best efforts, the 2022 legislature decided not to further invest in ongoing COVID public health work,” said Sarah Lochner, Executive Director of the Coalition of Local Health Officials. “As such, local public health is preparing to lay off staff. If something unexpected does happen, and public health is found unprepared, it’s on the legislature. It’s mind-boggling to me that after two years of pandemic response and with more money in its coffers than ever before, the legislature would actively deny this request. It worries me that collectively, we have learned nothing from this horrendous experience.”

Questions regarding the Workforce Report can be directed to the [Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials](#)’ Executive Director, Sarah Lochner, at sarah@oregonclho.org or Program Manager, Laura Daily, at laura@oregonclho.org.

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