# ASTHO's 2023 Environmental Scan of Current and Emerging Public Health Priorities: Findings on Workforce Development

ASTHO's annual Environmental Scan of Current and Emerging Public Health Priorities (the Scan) identifies state, territorial, and freely associated state health agencies' top current and emerging priorities across public health domains. The Scan documents the focus issues and strategies health agencies are using to address these priorities.

This brief details the findings on state workforce development, which was identified by the 2023 Scan as the top public health infrastructure and capacity-building priority area among state health agencies (SHAs). Details about the methodology used for the Scan and other key findings from 2023 can be found in the *executive summary*.

## Workforce Development in the Scan

Workforce development was identified as the top public health infrastructure and capacity-building priority area among SHAs in this year's Scan. Workforce development maintained its position from 2022 to this year, due in large part to ongoing health workforce shortages causing significant strain on core functions of both the public health and healthcare systems.

Adding to the strain of existing workforce shortages are ongoing challenges health agencies face recruiting and retaining highly skilled workforces, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic prompted high staff turnover. Further, the ending of the COVID-19 public health emergency this year has led to disruptions in federal funding for new and existing positions in some areas. That said, CDC's 2022 Public Health Infrastructure Grant has made recruiting, retaining, supporting, and training the public health workforce a central focus of its investment, so we can expect to see more SHA plans prioritizing these activities in the future.

# Workforce Development Focus Issues and Strategies

## Training and Education

To enhance workforce training and education, SHAs are:

- Working to foster a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing by offering skill-specific trainings, workshops, leadership and supervisory trainings, and on-the-job financial empowerment training.

- Providing resources for professional development and offering education support and incentives, such as tuition reimbursement programs, to promote education enrollment.

- Utilizing centralized training platforms and modules to monitor and address staff competency gaps.

- Ensuring staff receive diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings, with a particular focus on staff cultural competency and understanding of health equity concepts.

- Investing in data infrastructure trainings to advance data modernization efforts.

- Providing staff with the necessary skills to maintain regulatory compliance.

- Training staff on effective grant writing to secure funding for public health programs.

## Recruitment and Retention

To bolster workforce recruitment and retention efforts, SHAs are:

- Working to create cultures of wellness, improving employee work-life balance, and offering employee assistance programs and flexible work arrangements.

- Establishing employee recognition programs, conducting stay interviews to assess job satisfaction, ensuring competitive pay and equitable salaries, and offering structured onboarding and orientation programs to ensure smooth transitions for new employees.

- Implementing policies and programs that promote a healthy work environment, such as tobacco-free campus policies, breastfeeding support programs, healthy in-office food options, and physical activity opportunities.

- Adopting equitable recruitment and retention practices, with a focus on increasing the representation of public health and healthcare professionals from historically marginalized and rural populations to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce.

- Collaborating with educational institutions to develop public health career pathways, internships, and mentorship programs to build a strong future public health workforce.

- Conducting workforce needs assessments to understand the availability of trained professionals and inform workforce planning and development.

## (Re-)Building Clinical and Laboratory Workforce Capacity

To build clinical and laboratory workforce capacity and address national health workforce shortages, SHAs are:

- Utilizing many of the recruitment and retention strategies noted above.

- Collaborating with educational institutions, healthcare systems, community health centers, safety net clinics, and other organizations to share resources and coordinate recruitment and retention efforts.

- Establishing robust community health worker programs, offering incentives for healthcare professionals to work in underserved areas, and focusing recruitment and retention efforts in historically marginalized and rural populations to address inequities in healthcare provider representation and distribution.

- Assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare and laboratory workforce availability and distribution to inform future workforce planning and resilience strategies.

ASTHO's Public Health—Hope, Equity, Resilience, and Opportunity (PH-HERO) initiative was designed to address workforce burnout and moral injury, aid in overall employee retention and recruitment efforts, and support a culture of well-being and resilience within public health agencies. As PH-HERO moves into its second year, the PH-HERO Learning Community has expanded to include 13 jurisdictions, including new and returning sites. Visit the *PH-HERO Workforce Resource Center* to explore tools, recommendations, scholarly literature, and more information about supporting the public health workforce at an organizational level.