

2022 Environmental Scan: Executive Summary



The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials' (ASTHO's) annual Environmental Scan tracks current public health priorities and trends in the U.S. state and island jurisdictions. In past years, ASTHO has developed one Environmental Scan summarizing both state and island jurisdiction priorities. This year, recognizing that the states and island jurisdictions have different needs, capacities, and opportunities available to them, ASTHO conducted two separate scans. The first section of this report details our findings regarding state public health priorities, while the addendum on page 4 summarizes our findings regarding island jurisdiction priorities.

STATE PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES

A swiftly evolving public health landscape presents a range of public health trends and issues that require state health agency (SHA) action and engagement. To identify the most salient public health trends and issues across the United States this year, a qualitative analysis of 30 state health improvement plans (SHIPs) and 29 SHA strategic plans was conducted from March to June 2022. The included documents were either active within a defined time period (e.g., 2020-2025) or else were created in-or-after 2018 by the jurisdictional health agency. We also distributed a survey to state health officials (SHOs) representing all 10 HHS state regional groups from June to July 2022, requesting that each SHO list their top three programmatic, infrastructural, and emerging public health priorities. This report highlights what our Environmental Scan identified as the most prominent state public health issues in 2022.

KEY HEALTH EQUITY STRATEGIES

Health equity is a core focus in all spheres of public health policy and practice. The 2022 scan identified these actions as key strategies that states used to address health inequities, highlighted by the top current and emerging public health issues:

- Supporting Community-Based, Person-Centered Systems of Care
- Developing an Anti-Racist and Culturally Competent Health Workforce
- Addressing Systemic and Economic Drivers of Disparate Health Outcomes
- Promoting Personal and Organizational Health Literacy
- Emphasizing Equity in all Policies

Programmatic Priorities

- 1. Behavioral Health and Substance Use** is a priority area in **73%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three programmatic priority in the past year by **50%** of SHO survey respondents, ranking it the number-one overall programmatic priority area for SHAs in 2022. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**
 - **Opioid Misuse, Addiction, and Overdose**
 - **Reducing and Preventing Initiation of Substance Use in Youths**
- 2. Communicable Disease Control** is a priority area in **39%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three programmatic priority in the past year by **80%** of SHO survey respondents, ranking it the number-one programmatic priority among SHOs in 2022. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **COVID-19 Response and Recovery**
 - **Preparation for and Response to Emerging Communicable Disease Outbreaks**
- 3. Access to and Linkage with Care** is a priority area in **78%** of SHA plans included in the scan, the most of any other programmatic area, and was listed as a top-three programmatic priority in the past year by **30%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Expanding and Integrating Primary and Behavioral Healthcare Services**
 - **Community-Based, Person-Centered Systems of Care**
 - **Access to Healthcare and Social Services in Rural Areas**
 - **Meeting the Needs of an Aging Population**
- 4. Chronic Disease Prevention** is a priority area in **63%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three programmatic priority in the past year by **15%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Personal Health Literacy, Education, and Engagement**
 - **Modifiable Personal Health Behaviors - Diet, Exercise, Alcohol and Smoking Habits**
- 5. Maternal, Child, and Family Health** is a priority area in **64%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three priority in the past year by **10%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Youth Mental and Social Wellbeing**
 - **Maternal and Infant Mortality**
 - **Racial and Socioeconomic Inequities in Perinatal Outcomes**
- 6. Social Determinants of Health** is a priority area in **49%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three programmatic priority in the past year by **30%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Environmental Determinants of Health**
 - **Housing, Food, and Economic Security**
 - **Community Cohesion and Capacity-Building**

Infrastructural Priorities

- 1. Workforce Development** is a priority area in **64%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three infrastructural priority in the past year by **47%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Workforce Resiliency and Capacity-Building**
 - **Developing an Anti-Racist and Culturally Competent Workforce**
- 2. Communications** is a priority area in **54%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three infrastructural priority in the past year by **53%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Organizational Health Literacy and Communication**
 - **SHO Call-Out: Combatting Misinformation and Restoring Trust**
- 3. Organizational Administrative Competencies** is a priority area in **68%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three infrastructural priority in the past year by **16%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Data Modernization and Interoperability**
 - **Improving Organizational Efficiency, Sustainability, and Accountability**
- 4. Emergency Preparedness and Response** is a priority area in **32%** of SHA plans included in the scan. It was listed as a top-three infrastructural priority in the past year by **58%** of SHO survey respondents and an anticipated top-three priority in the coming year by **53%** of respondents, ranking it the number-one current and emerging infrastructural priority among SHOs in 2022. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **COVID-19 Response and Recovery**
 - **Preparation and Response to Emerging Communicable Disease Outbreaks**
 - **Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events**
- 5. Collaboration and Partnership Development** is a priority in **56%** of SHA plans included in the scan and was listed as a top-three infrastructural priority in the past year by **32%** of SHO survey respondents. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Collaborating with Communities and Building Local-Level Partnerships**
 - **SHO Call-Out: Restoring Partner and Legislator Trust**
- 6. Policy Development and Support** is a priority area in **49%** of SHA plans included in the scan and is a key component of most SHA strategies to address current and emerging public health issues. Current and emerging priorities within this area include:
 - **Shifting Toward New Models of Healthcare Delivery**
 - **Closing Gaps in Healthcare Coverage**

ASTHO's membership includes five territories and three freely associated states located in the Pacific and the Atlantic. Recognizing that the states and island jurisdictions have many key differences, ASTHO conducted two separate scans in 2022. ASTHO created this addendum to reflect the current and emerging public health priorities of U.S. island jurisdiction health agencies and their officials, distinct from those of the states.

ASTHO utilized a modified methodology in the development of this addendum. Because up-to-date strategic documents are not publicly available for many territories and freely associated states, this addendum incorporates information expressed by territorial and freely associated state health officials during ASTHO surveys (e.g., ASTHO Profile survey, ASTHO Environmental Scan survey), forums (e.g., Insular Affairs Committee to the ASTHO Board), and individual conversations with ASTHO staff. This scan also incorporates data from strategic health agency documents that met our inclusion criteria from the Atlantic island areas. The included documents were either active within a defined time period (e.g., 2020-2025), or else were created in-or-after 2018 by the jurisdictional health agency. The goal of this modified methodology was to ensure a product that is representative of island jurisdiction health leaders' concerns, priorities, and goals.

These were identified as the top current and emerging strategic public health priorities across island areas in 2022:

Programmatic Priorities	Infrastructural Priorities
<p>Lessening the prevalence and spread of infectious disease by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreasing vaccine preventable diseases, including COVID-19.• Preventing and controlling Zika, Dengue, and other tropical diseases.• Addressing tuberculosis (TB), including multi-drug resistant TB.• Treating and preventing sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. <p>Preventing and treating chronic disease by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing cancer, respiratory diseases, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.• Decreasing major risk factors for disease.• Improving nutrition and physical activity. <p>Preparation for responding to severe weather events, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening emergency preparedness response and recovery networks.• Planning for and lessening the impact of climate change. <p>Meeting the needs of specialized populations, including efforts focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building mental and behavioral health service options.• Substance abuse prevention and treatment.• Improving access to veterans' health services.• Improving health across the lifespan, with an emphasis on maternal, infant, child, and older adult health.• Increasing access to and linkage with healthcare.• Developing supports for migrants and people who do not speak the hosting jurisdictions' official language.	<p>Strengthening data systems and capacity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bolstering local data collection and clinical and applied research.• Expanding data for decision-making.• Improving data interoperability.• Promoting data modernization. <p>Strengthening the health workforce by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bolstering recruitment and retention within these geographically isolated health agencies.• Improving local academic pipelines.• Increasing salaries and addressing salary gaps. <p>Strengthening health agency administrative capacity, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy development and support.• Financial infrastructure and sustainability.• Business process improvement for improved procurement, recruitment, and grants management. <p>Building island health equity infrastructure by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing data, personnel, and administrative capacity to empower jurisdictions' health equity efforts.• Incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout health agency culture, programs, and research.• Strengthening community-based partnerships and community-based public health.