

The Future of Public Health in Nevada: The Role of Education

Trudy Larson, MD
Director, School of Community Health Sciences

Educating for the Future

- ▶ To impact health statistics and improve populations trends requires more than producing more public health practitioners
- ▶ Two prong approach
 - educates consumers (the general population)
 - produces skilled public health professionals
- ▶ Significant increase in resources to support both of these efforts

Why do we need education to help protect the public health?

- ▶ Nevada Health statistics are dismal.
- ▶ All sectors of the government dealing with Public Health had significant financial cuts resulting in decreases in numbers of public health workers, reduction in infrastructure support, and decreases in direct services.
- ▶ Does this make any sense?
- ▶ How do we change this?

Consumer Development

- ▶ Consumer Education should be life long and use the latest modalities
- ▶ Need Public Health topics throughout formal educational experience
 - (K-12)– all Americans should have basic knowledge of public health and what it encompasses
- ▶ Higher education–Increase undergraduate public health education
 - Undergrad competencies such as required/core courses
 - ASPH has new initiative that lists suggested topics that all undergraduates should be exposed to
 - Undergrad majors that prepare students for public health roles and/or entry into graduate programs in public health or health related professional fields

As educated members of society, all undergraduates should be able to...

- 1.1 Define public health and related roles and responsibilities of government, non-government agencies, and private organizations.
- 1.2 Describe risk factors and modes of transmission for infectious and chronic diseases and how these diseases affect both personal and population health.
- 1.3 Describe the reciprocal relationships among literature, the arts, and public health.
- 1.4 List the leading causes of mortality, morbidity, and health disparities among local, regional, and global populations.
- 1.5 Discuss the role of gender, race, ethnicity, and other evolving demographics in affecting population health.
- 1.6 Discuss major local, national, and global health challenges.
- 1.7 Explain how the organizational structure, financing, and delivery of personal health care and public health services impact population health.
- 1.8 Explain the influence that science and technology have on individual and population health.
- 1.9 Outline approaches for assessing and controlling environmental hazards that affect community health.
- 1.10 Assess the values and perspectives of diverse individuals, communities, and cultures and their influence on health behaviors, choices, and practices.
- 1.11 Appreciate the role of community collaborations in promoting population health.
- 1.12 Recognize the importance of key events and milestones in the history and development of the field of public health.
- 1.13 Value the relationship between human rights and health.

The Public Health Work Force Problem

- ▶ By 2020, nation will be facing a shortfall of more than 250,000 public health workers
- ▶ The public health workforce is diminishing over time even with increasing population numbers
 - 2001 workforce was 448,000, 50,00 less than in 1980
- ▶ More than 100,000 government public health workers (approx ¼ of the workforce) will be eligible to retire by 2012
- ▶ Estimated 19% of workforce were lost between 2008 and 2010 due to reduced budgets
- ▶ Reduced workers= reduced services
 - Doing more with less
- ▶ Budget cuts resulted in 89% of state health agencies cutting services between 2008–2010

Proposed Solutions

- ▶ Increase federal funding for public health education
 - Attract students to public health graduate training
 - Improve practice experience for students
 - Promote more diverse public health workforce
 - Loan forgiveness
 - Enhanced opportunities for Health Disparities research and fellowships
- ▶ Build capacity in schools of public health
- ▶ Provide grants to state health departments to promote worker training
- ▶ Fund efforts to collect data about the public health workforce

Work Force Development

- ▶ **Graduate education– increase the number of graduate programs in public health**
 - Accreditation to ensure competencies met
 - Expand capacity for students (traditional and non-traditional)
- ▶ **Public Health Professionals education**
 - In 2001, four out of five public health workers had no formal training for their specific activities
 - In 2008, only 20% of local health department's top executives held a public health degree
- ▶ **Federal solutions (ACA) include offering loan repayment, mid-career training grants, training grants with limited funding**
- ▶ **Use of public health department accreditation programs to improve the quality of public health services**

What are we doing?

- ▶ UNR just received accreditation for MPH and UNLV is on track to get theirs: two schools to help increase the number of public health degrees
 - Dual degrees increasing
 - Looking to increase number of MPH tracks offered
- ▶ Partnering with Regional Training Centers to expand capacity to train public health professionals
- ▶ Creating innovative training strategies for busy health professionals
- ▶ Creating undergrad training options

What do we need? What didn't we get?

- ▶ **Need resources to support increasing the number and diversity of faculty**
 - Research and scholarly activity help find ways to be effective and efficient with our programs
- ▶ **Need IT resources to help expand the reach of the traditional classroom (rapidly becoming a reality)**
- ▶ **Need linkages to the community to provide ongoing feedback about what training/education is needed and how we are doing with the existing education**
- ▶ **We didn't get support from the state.....lumped in with all state workers in terms of reductions even though our public health needs are large**
- ▶ **We need a clear mandate from "the people" that public health matters and that strategic use of resources must result in better health outcomes**
 - Hold public health professionals accountable for improving health when resources are available (create a culture that improves quality)