

Career Opportunities in Public Health

As we enter this new millennium, the world faces both old and new public health challenges--the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the threat of bioterrorism, epidemics ranging from heart disease to cancer, the health of our increasingly elderly populations, the safety of our water and our food, and high-risk lifestyles, like smoking and substance abuse that endanger our health. (www.jhsph.edu/Academics/MPH/prospect_student)

Infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, have the ability to destroy lives, strain community resources, and even threaten nations. In today's global environment, new diseases have the potential to spread across the world in a matter of days, or even hours, making early detection and action more important than ever. By assisting state and local health departments the Center for Disease Control and Prevention works to protect the public every day; from using innovative "fingerprinting" technology to identifying a food borne illness to evaluating a family violence prevention program in an urban community; from training partners in HIV education to protecting children from vaccine preventable diseases through immunizations. (www.cdc.gov/about/default.htm)

Public health is inherently multi-disciplinary and so, too, are the interests and expertise of faculty and students, which extend across the biological, quantitative, and social sciences. With roots in biology, they are able to confront the most pressing diseases of our time--AIDS, cancer, and heart disease--by adding to the knowledge of their underlying structure and function. Core quantitative disciplines like epidemiology and biostatistics are fundamental to analyzing the broad impact of health problems, allowing them to look beyond individuals to entire populations. And, because preventing disease is at the heart of public health, one must look towards the social sciences to better understand health-related behaviors and their societal influences--critical elements in educating and empowering people to make healthier lifestyle choices. (www.hsph.harvard.edu/about.html)

Nutrition and epidemiologic aspects of nutrition can also affect public health. Nutrition policy and the evaluation of nutritional interventions are long-standing interests, particularly as they concern the populations of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the United States. Research ranges from molecular biology to human studies of cancer and heart disease, including the conduct of population based intervention trials. Techniques in biochemistry, physiology, biostatistics, epidemiology, and related fields are all relevant to health and nutrition. (www.hsph.harvard.edu/about.html)

The need to understand the essential links between the social, physical, and economic environments and the health of individual patients and their families is vital. The areas of study represent diverse areas of interest including family practice, epidemiology and biometry, environmental and occupational health, nutrition, public health policy, and the social and economic aspects of the health care system. They direct research efforts at issues affecting the communities at large and their individuals.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

Salaries vary widely depending on the size and nature of the organization as well as the candidate's level of experience. Salaries can range between \$30,000 and \$75,000, with entry level salaries for those with an advanced degree being in the \$40,000-\$50,000 range on average.

It is difficult to obtain ideal jobs in high-impact areas without at least five years experience

or more. Jobs in the areas which one wants to focus in, whether health related or not, are a good place to start. When going international, it is best and usually required to have a working knowledge and experience outside of the field. Internships and jobs right out of school are good ways to achieve this experience.

With the broad nature of a field like this, the career paths are varied. Food security specialists, health educators, and program managers are just the beginning of the need that is out there. Many of these paths will lead to jobs around the world with varied needs and demands. Organizations like Family Health International, Save the Children and the World Health Organization all have many programs throughout the world to implement basic necessities in countries where resources are scarce.

Qualifications Necessary/Application Procedures to Enter Field

Typically fields like this require at least a master's degree in public health, nutrition or a related field. Depending on the nature of the work or the area of expertise involved, some require a more focused Ph.D. The growing trend amongst employers seems to be an expertise not only in your field but also the region one plans to work in. Experience in international affairs relating or not relating to the health fields is an invaluable advantage when thinking of choosing a career of this sort in another country.

Sample Employers

- Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/>
- Africare, www.africare.org
- American Friends Service Committee, www.afsc.org
- American Red Cross International, www.redcross.org/
- American Refugee Committee, <http://www.arcrelief.org/site/PageServer#>
- Bread for the World, www.charitywire.com/charity28
- Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), www.cedpa.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov
- Child Health Foundation, www.childhealthfoundation.org/
- Child Fund International, <http://www.childfund.org/>
- CONCERN Worldwide US Inc., www.concernusa.org
- CARE, www.care.org
- Doctors Without Borders, www.doctorswithoutborders.org/
- Emerging Leaders (HHS professional internship), <http://hhsu.learning.hhs.gov/elp/>
- Global Health Council, www.globalhealth.org/
- Helen Keller International, www.hki.org
- Hunger Project, www.thp.org
- International Women's Health Coalition, www.iwhc.org
- Management Science for Health, www.msh.org/
- Mercy Corps, www.mercycorps.org
- Operation USA, www.opusa.org/
- Partners in Health, www.pih.org/index.html
- Partners of the Americas, ncboliviapartners.org
- Physician for Human Rights, <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/>
- Project HOPE, www.projecthope.org
- Save the Children, www.savethechildren.org
- UNAIDS, www.unaids.org
- World Concern, www.worldconcern.org

- World Health Organization (WHO), www.who.int/en/

Demand and Future Challenges of Profession

There is a big demand for professionals in many fields domestically, and a great need is present abroad. With new initiatives the demand for qualified individuals is on the rise especially in impoverished lands like Africa, Asia and the Middle East. New programs and initiatives are constantly arising through varied organizations, whether it is to start vision testing or an HIV/AIDS program, the international demand is an omnipresent outcry that will not diminish. As our domestic population ages and health care costs continue to rise, policy issues will not disappear.

The future challenges are difficult to foresee. HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and control are at the top of everyone's list along with cancer research. Destitution and malnutrition are also challenges that are ever-present in the areas where these fields are most needed. There is a need to promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health by assisting individuals and communities to adopt healthy behaviors. Also to collect and analyze data to identify community needs prior to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, policies and environments. This may also serve as a resource to assist individuals, other professionals, or the community, and may administer fiscal resources for health education programs. (stats.bls.gov/oco/oco20052.htm)

Resources For More Information

Associations/Websites

- Action Without Borders, idealist.org/
- Emerging Leaders, (HHS Professional Internship), www.hhs.gov/jobs/elp
- International Career Employment Weekly, www.internationaljobs.org/contents.html
- Foreign Policy Association, www.fpa.org/jobs_contact2423/jobs_contact.htm
- Public Health Jobs Worldwide, www.jobspublichealth.com/

Publications (in Career Library)

- Exploring Healthcare Careers, Ferguson Publishing (2002)
- Federal Jobs: The Ultimate Guide, Dana Morgan and Robert Goldenkoff, Arco Publishing (2002)
- International Career Employment Weekly, www.internationaljobs.org/contents.html
- International Nutrition Foundation - <http://www.inffoundation.org>
- American Public Health Association - www.apha.org/public-health/international.htm
- The American Society for Nutrition - www.nutrition.org