



Public Health Career

Why pursue a career in public health?

- **Public health is an exciting and growing field of study.** The field challenges its professionals to confront complex health issues, such as improving access to health care, controlling infectious disease, and reducing environmental hazards, violence, substance abuse, and injury.
- **Public health is a diverse and dynamic field.** Public Health professionals come from varying educational backgrounds and can specialize in an array of fields. A host of specialists, including teachers, journalists, researchers, administrators, environmentalists, demographers, social workers, laboratory scientists, and attorneys, work to protect the health of the public.
- **Public health is a field geared toward serving others.** Public health professionals serve local, national, and international communities. They are leaders who meet the many exciting challenges in protecting the public's health today and in the future.
- **Public health is a rewarding field.** The field of public health offers great personal fulfillment - working towards improving people's health and well being is a rewarding day's work.

Who should consider a degree in public health?

Public health is a field that offers an abundance of job opportunities to suit a variety of interests and skills. Whether you are more interested in crunching numbers, conducting research, or working with people, there is a place for you in the field of public health. Recent college graduates and those that have been in the field for years have something to offer and to gain in this field. Public health is ideal for those that gain satisfaction knowing that they are working to improve the lives of others.

How can a graduate degree in public health enhance my career opportunities?

Many public health jobs require a graduate degree in public health. A graduate degree gives public health professionals a competitive edge over other professionals and enables professionals to:

- gain knowledge of the factors which influence local, national and global legislative and social policies;

- apply broad-based, state-of-the-art quantitative and qualitative skills needed for problem solving;
- develop multidisciplinary and collaborative strategies for solving health-related problems;
- enhance communication skills by working with diverse populations; and,
- be positioned for a leadership role in health promotion and disease prevention.

What are the career opportunities in public health and what salary ranges can I expect after graduation?

While there are dozens of specialties in public health, most career opportunities are found in the following fields. The salary ranges, as follows, are the actual salaries earned (adjusted for inflation using the national CPI - Bureau of Labor Statistics) within one year of graduation as reported by the most recent nationwide survey of graduates conducted by ASPH:

- **Health Services Administration**
\$37,050 - \$161,400
- **Biostatistics**
\$33,000 - \$63,000
- **Epidemiology**
\$38,175 - \$136,237
- **Health Education/Behavioral Science**
\$33,000 - \$86,625
- **Environmental Health**
\$44,550 - \$143,700
- **International Health**
\$31,500 - \$86,625
- **Nutrition**
\$31,500 - \$70,875
- **Public Health Practice/Program Management**
\$41,175 - \$102,000
- **Biomedical Laboratory**
\$31,500 - \$78,750

Where do public health professionals work?

Public health professionals work in both the public and private sectors. Many public health graduates will find work in the public sector in local, state, or federal health

departments. The jobs available at health departments range from Food Safety Inspectors to Health Educators; from Policy Analysts to Epidemiologists. Other public health professionals will find work in university systems as researchers.

Those interested in working for a non-profit organization can find jobs in health advocacy, policy, or research for organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the Red Cross, or a local non-profit that focuses on specific health issues.

Still other public health professionals will find work in the private sector - working in randomized control trials for pharmaceutical companies or for health insurance companies.



Do I need an advanced degree to work in the field of public health?

While it is possible to gain experience in the field without an advanced degree, most public health professionals need at least a Masters degree for career advancement. For more information on this topics, see the Frequently Asked Question: How can a graduate degree in public health enhance my career opportunities?

What kind of job title can I expect after graduating with a degree in public health?

Job titles, position descriptions, and salary ranges of recent public health graduates will vary greatly based on their course of study and interests. Some sample career titles taken from www.publichealthjobs.net in September 2005 are listed below:

- Public Health Management Analyst
- Director of Programs and Services
- Health Communications Specialist
- Research Scientist
- Environmental Health Intelligence Analyst
- Manager, Breastfeeding Initiatives

Choosing a Public Health School

Which school of public health should I attend?

There are 37 CEPH accredited schools of public health. All accredited schools meet rigorous accreditation standards and each has unique strengths in research, service and education. For a complete list of accredited schools of public health, see the ASPH website at: schools.asph.org.

What undergraduate major should I choose?

Students of public health come from a variety of educational backgrounds, but there is coursework that can better prepare you for the field of study you choose. For example, coursework in biology and mathematics is highly recommended for students who plan to concentrate in epidemiology or biostatistics. For Behavioral Sciences, Health Education or Global Health, courses in sociology, psychology, education or anthropology are beneficial. Health Services Administration students find that a business background is a plus. A biology or chemistry background is helpful for the study of Environmental Health. All schools of public health require competence in effective communication (both verbal and written); therefore, students should try to take advantage of undergraduate opportunities to hone these skills.

What are the entrance requirements?

While schools of public health look for high graduate entrance exam scores and GPA, other aspects of an applicant's record, such as a career achievement, professional experience, and clarity of career goals also are equally important. Admissions decisions are based on an overall assessment of the ability of the applicants to successfully complete the degree track area selected. Each program or track within a given department may set additional requirements for admission, therefore, applicants should refer to the individual programs for details.

How much is tuition and how long does it take to get a degree in Public Health?

The average yearly cost of education including tuition, fees, books, etc in 2004-2005 was \$12,264 for in-state tuition and fees and \$18,665 for out-of-state tuition





and fees; and the median for in-state was \$8,190 and \$18,035 for out-of-state. For in-state, the range is from \$2,826 per year to \$31,522; and \$3,665 to \$33,225 for out-of-state. Most master's programs are two years in length. However, there are also accelerated programs, distance learning programs, programs for part-time students, etc.

What is the difference between the different degrees? How do I choose the one that's right for me?

There are many different degree programs for those that interested in studying public health. Some of the programs include:

- MPH = Master of Public Health
- MHA = Master of Health Administration
- MHSA = Master of Health Services Administration
- MSPH = Master of Science in Public Health
- DrPH = Doctor of Public Health
- PhD = Doctor of Philosophy

In general, the MPH degree will include coursework in a number of public health disciplines, such as administration, epidemiology, environmental health, and behavioral health. Specialized degrees such as a Master of Health Administration will be more focused on a specific topic.

Another distinction between degrees is the professional degree versus the academic degrees. Professional degrees generally have a greater orientation towards practice in public health settings. The MPH, DrPH, and MHA are example of degrees which are geared towards those who want careers as practitioners of public health in traditional health departments, managed care organizations, community-based organizations, hospitals, consulting firms, international agencies, state and federal agencies, among others.

Academic degrees are more oriented toward students wishing to seek a career in academics and research rather than public health practice. Examples of academic degrees are the MS , PhD, and ScD.

However, each school of public health can tailor their degree programs significantly. Student interested in getting a degree in public health should check with individual schools for more information on specific degree programs.

Why should I consider a dual degree in public health?

Dual degrees are available to those that are pursuing degrees or have degrees in fields such as nursing, law, social work, public policy, business, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. At many schools of public health, people with an advanced degree are eligible for an accelerated MPH program. A public health degree will help those in other fields understand the principles of public health and apply these principles to their practices.

Ask us your question! info@asph.org

