

The Northwest Regional Network: A Successful Model for Collaborative Regional Workforce Development

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In 2000, public health workforce development leaders from six Northwestern states — Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming – and the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) at the University of Washington’s School of Public Health and Community Medicine developed the Northwest Regional Public Health Workforce Development Network. The Regional Network is a workforce development planning and priority-setting group, convened and staffed by NWCPHP, that promotes collaborative regional public health workforce development planning and curriculum and technical assistance resource sharing the state and academic partners.

Before the development of the Regional Network in 2000, the Northwestern region’s public health leaders had a very limited regional public health workforce focus. They lacked a forum for developing and sharing training materials, needs assessments and training plans and did not have access to formal linkages with national workforce development activities. These challenges emphasized the need for a regional coordinating entity that promoted access to national and regional training and technical assistance resources. The Regional Network’s early activities focused on relationship development, identifying shared priorities and emphasized local customization of core curriculum and face-to-face training by both state/local health department and NWCPHP faculty. Following the 9-11 attacks, an emphasis on face-to-face training limited the Regional Network’s ability to provide the timely, accessible training and technical assistance activities necessary to meet the changing needs of the Northwest’s largely rural and geographically dispersed public health workforce.

Today, the Regional Network is a strong, active presence for collaborative workforce development in the Northwest. The Network focuses on balancing and integrating overall public health preparedness and public health emergency preparedness activities. Curricula are disseminated through face-to-face training and traditional educational programs, complemented by expanded access to distance-learning methodologies that promote timely, responsive and geographically accessible training programs. Selected curricula produced in partnership between the NWCPHP and the six states include *Bioterrorist Attack on Food: A Tabletop Exercise*, *Preparing for and Responding to Bioterrorism* for Public Health Workers and

Clinicians, and *Public Health Core Functions and Essential Services Training* offered in partnership with the University of Wyoming. The Network and NWCPHP provide on-site Summer Institutes in 4 Northwestern states using NWCPHP and local faculty partnerships. Over 400 workers have received training at Summer Institutes during 2002-2003. The Regional Network also collaborates on technical assistance activities, including the development of an emergency preparedness training needs assessment instrument and reporting templates used in 4 Northwestern states and in health departments across the US and. participation in the NACCHO Project Public Health Ready pilot site activities in Thurston County, Washington.