

***Evidence-Based Forum on
Effective Recruitment and Retention Efforts***

Background

A well trained, adequately staffed public health workforce at the national, federal, state, and local levels is essential to ensure that the nation's public health system is able to protect and improve the health of all Americans and effectively respond to potential terrorist events, emerging infectious diseases, and other threats to the public's health. Current public health workforce trends indicate that the workforce is aging and many public health workers are retiring or nearing retirement. For example, the average age of the public health nurse, a major component of the public health workforce, is 49.5 years.¹ Furthermore, up to 43% of the state public health department workforce will retire or be eligible for retirement by 2006.²

To curb this growing crisis, public health leaders have begun discussing potential strategies to:

- Strengthen the skills and competence of the existing workforce to fill the "experience" void left behind as workers retire;
- Expand training on new challenges in public health, such as responding to emerging infectious diseases, terrorist events, and other public health threats and emergencies;
- Effectively prepare and recruit students and professionals from other disciplines to enter and remain in the practice of public health to ensure our nation has adequate numbers of workers, in the right places, with the right skills to protect and improve the health of all Americans;
- Examine the working environment of public health agencies to determine if there are changes that could be made to bolster retention and recruitment; and
- Identify, share, and coordinate recruitment and retention efforts in order to reduce duplication and maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

Over the course of the last decade, the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (Council), its member organizations, and other public health system partners have played key roles in laying the groundwork for efforts in these first two areas by advancing numerous efforts to improve the skills and competence of the current public health workforce. During this time period, a consensus set of Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals has been developed; public health systems and workforce research agendas have been created and prioritized; the number of academic health departments has increased; and academic/practice linkages have flourished.

¹ *State Public Health Employee Worker Shortage*. Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Council of State Governments, and the National Association of State Personnel Executives. 2004.

² *The Trends Alert: State Employee Workforce Shortage*. Council of State Governments and the National Association of State Personnel Executives. October 2002.

Forum

In addition to continuing this excellent work, the Council has decided to take immediate action to address recruitment and retention issues. Its focus will be on identifying, sharing, and discussing evidence and experiences that can be used for developing effective strategies to attract students and professionals from other fields to public health practice settings and to encourage current workers to remain in such positions. On September 28, 2004 the Council voted to make as one of its objectives the advancement of strategies to identify and close gaps in workforce recruitment and retention efforts to assure the public's health. Council members voiced their interest in convening a forum that would provide a foundational understanding of evidence on what strategies have proven successful in addressing worker shortages in public health and in other fields.

The Council plans to convene such a forum on January 25, 2005 in Washington, DC. Individuals will present information on recruitment and retention efforts underway in fields experiencing worker shortages and on their effectiveness. The discussion will also focus on how successful strategies in other fields can be applied to public health and on what questions still need to be answered in order to develop plans for effective recruitment and retention programs. The forum will seek to accomplish the following:

- Provide attendees with an introduction to the evidence available and the evidence not yet available that can be used as recruitment and retention strategies are developed; and
- Identify the Council's next steps to facilitate member organizations' and partners' efforts to plan national public health recruitment and retention initiatives.

Following the forum, the Council will produce these deliverables:

- Develop a brief report summarizing the evidence shared at the meeting, as well as the discussion of how the public health field can apply lessons learned in other fields and what research questions must still be pursued; and
- Work with member and partner organizations to support the creation of an online clearinghouse of research and resources related to worker recruitment and retention.

The Council appreciates the vital importance of having an adequate number of skilled and competent public health workers to ensure that our nation has the capacity necessary to protect and improve the nation's health. The Council hopes this forum will serve as a key step in building the evidence base for the field's strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of public health workers.