

New England Alliance for Public Health Workforce Development

BU, Brown, Harvard, UMass, Yale



Overview

The Alliance develops and relies on strong collaborations among the academic partners and state and local public health practitioners who provide public health services to underserved areas and populations. It supports statewide academic-practice partnerships in each of the six New England States to assess, prioritize, plan, employ and evaluate training, using flexible learning formats, including distance learning, to deliver competency-based training and education to staff at local and state agencies, improving their ability to meet the public health needs of the communities they serve. Target audiences for The Alliance are current and future public health practitioners, including:

- Health directors
- Public health nurses
- Sanitarians / environmental health specialists
- Epidemiologists
- Health educators

Key Activities

The public health infrastructure in each of the New England states differs from the traditional county structure seen in most of the rest of the nation. They range from primarily small health departments in each community (Massachusetts) to the absence of local health departments (Rhode Island). The peculiarities of our region lead to a number of challenges in terms of public health workforce development. For example, a large percentage of the existing public health workforce lacks formal preparation in public health, exhibiting knowledge gaps in the ten Essential PH services and core competencies, along with emerging technical and scientific areas. Assessments in each state have demonstrated the need for training in basic functions of health departments (e.g., inspections, disease surveillance, epidemiologic investigations, legal requirements, etc.). In addition, health department personnel require training in cross-cutting competencies in areas such as leadership, communication, and program planning and evaluation. The Alliance provides effective training and education programs in each of these areas, designed for the adult learner, using traditional classroom formats, as well as a wide array of learning modes that use the latest technology, emphasizing distance learning techniques.

In addition to providing training to public health practitioners on the day-to-day activities of local and state agencies that are critical to maintaining the health of our communities, the Alliance increases the skills and readiness of the public health workforce to address any number of unexpected issues that pose an immediate threat to the health of the public or that, if unaddressed, will escalate into large scale problems with both human and financial consequences. Whether addressing a contaminated water supply, a communicable disease outbreak, or a natural disaster, public health practitioners are on the front lines. In a time when local health resources are being cut, particularly in underserved areas such as our many rural communities or low income areas throughout New England, it is more important than ever that those public health practitioners that remain are as well-trained as possible to deliver essential public health services.

Public Health in Action



“New Faces in Public Health” forum for high school students

Impact on Public Health Workforce

New England is characterized by socio-geographic challenges, such as large distances between urban centers, sizeable rural areas with few public health resources, and cities with diverse and low-income populations. Strengthened academic and practice partnerships in each of the New England states promote and advocate for workforce development and improvements to the public health system infrastructure. Key informant interviews reveal that practice partners value their relationships with their academic partners and vice versa. They feel that the Alliance provides a mechanism for connecting practitioners and public health academic programs so that schools are more aware of what is going on in the field and are consequently more capable of designing effective training to meet current and projected needs.

A well-trained workforce is essential to making the best use of resources available to protect the public. By training public health practitioners at the local level, we ensure that they are prepared to recognize and respond to public health problems as they arise. A better prepared workforce ensures better quality of health services in medically underserved communities. Although the current fiscal crisis has reduced public health staffing, the Alliance is using creative means, such as academic internships, to help bridge gaps in the services and to train the next generation of public health practitioners.

Each state continues to conduct in-state needs assessments of the learning needs of the public health workforce. Programs and individual trainings are evaluated for effectiveness to guide the development of future activities.

In 2010 alone, the Alliance conducted or sponsored almost 200 trainings, involving more than 2,000 individuals.

Key Partners

Connecticut:

Connecticut Area Health Education Centers, Connecticut Association of Directors of Health

Maine:

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine Center for Public Health

Massachusetts:

Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing, Boston Public Health Commission

New Hampshire:

Community Health Institute, Manchester Department of Health

Rhode Island:

Brown University, Rhode Island Area Health Education Centers

Vermont:

Vermont Department of Public Health, Vermont Healthcare Workforce Development Partners

Leadership

Principal Investigator: Anne T. Fidler, ScD

New England Alliance for Public Health Workforce Development

85 East Newton Street M-921, Boston, MA 02118

617.638.4647

afidler@bu.edu

<http://sph.bu.edu/otlt/alliance>

HRSA Public Health Training Centers



The Health Resources and Services Administration funded Public Health Training Centers (PHTC) are partnerships between accredited schools of public health, related academic institutions, and public health agencies and organizations. The PHTC Network improves the Nation's public health system by strengthening the technical, scientific, managerial, and leadership competence of current and future public health professionals. Public Health Training Centers assess the learning needs of the public health workforce, provide accessible training, and work with organizations to meet other strategic planning, education, and resource needs.

<http://www.publichealthtrainingcenters.org>



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