

# Public health graduates in the United States

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- Advocate for policies which will fully fund the government public health workforce in the United States
- Advocate for policies that will reduce barriers to hiring public health graduates, especially into the core public health workforce, such as reforms of the hiring process in government agencies and new support for student loan forgiveness and repayment
- Advocate for funding to support research on the public health workforce and the employment outcomes of public health graduates

Through the author's role at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, and as a leader of professional associations such as the career services assembly of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) and committee service with the National Association of Colleges and Employers, she has become involved with policy advocacy to advance the career development of public health graduates and better connect them with the workforce. This has included discussions with leaders of ASPPH, including its policy advocacy director, and broader discussions with a range of public health stakeholders, including many who will be involved with new hiring efforts related to the American Rescue Plan and Public Health AmeriCorps.<sup>1</sup>

For example, the author was recently invited to be a closing plenary conference speaker at the Public Health Improvement Training conference, speaking alongside the Executive Director of the de Beaumont Foundation, a major public health philanthropy, and a senior leader of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, speaking to 250 public health workforce professionals from around the United States about how to better recruit new public health graduates into government. She also presented a blog article, written specifically for government public health agencies, about how to improve their recruitment efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the author recently received an award from the Columbia University Provost's office to design a Massive Open Online Course to provide training to public health students in advocacy, specifically to increase their awareness of the underfunding of the public health workforce and to find political power to improve funding and support for the workforce. This training will also be open to current government public health workers, who are often unfamiliar or uncomfortable with navigating challenging political situations.

Finally, the author has been able to send an official letter, signed by the Deans of four leading public health schools, to the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare, to attempt to influence the direction of the new investments in the public health workforce proposed by the Biden Administration.

**Raising awareness of public health careers among the general public, to encourage more people to begin careers in the field**

The author has co-authored, with Dr. Beth Seltzer, MD, MPH, a fully revised edition of a book for lay audiences, *101+ Careers in Public Health, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*.<sup>3</sup> This book is approximately 190,000 words in length and includes 25 chapters, interviews with 53 public health professionals, and extensive, updated research on public health career pathways, with a specific emphasis on those which contribute to EPHOs/EPHS. It is the only book currently in print in the United States which focuses on public health careers; and we hope it will have a broad impact on the general population to enhance their understanding of career pathways in the field. The book also contains a unique, first-of-its kind career assessment tool which connects career interests based on a commonly-referenced vocational theory (the Holland Codes<sup>4,5</sup>) with specific occupations, identified through research which was the basis of chapter 5 of the thesis<sup>6</sup>. The connection between public health occupations identified through taxonomies and current job postings with public health career choices, as the basis of a career guidance tool, is a new and likely unique contribution to the field of career guidance; and occupational information in the *101+ Careers in Public Health* book connects to occupation descriptions connected to Standard Occupational Classification codes as described in the O\*Net Online<sup>7</sup> and Occupational Outlook Handbook<sup>8</sup>, which is based on data from the US Department of Labor Statistics. The book also centers equity and inclusion, include career profile of individuals from diverse backgrounds, outlines public health careers which are available to people with educational backgrounds ranging from no postsecondary education through PhDs and MDs, and focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on public health careers.

# 101+ CAREERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

BETH SELTZER | HEATHER KRASNA



Source: *101+ Careers in Public Health, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Springer Publishing (draft cover).*<sup>3</sup>

The author also speaks frequently to the news media and has written numerous blog articles on topics related to public health careers, often on highly prominent websites like a blog article which was published by *The Muse*, one of the nation's leading career websites (considered in the top

100 career advice websites, and in the top 3,300 websites in the world and top 1,304<sup>th</sup> in the United States)<sup>9-11</sup>. We are hopeful that these efforts will enhance the awareness of public health careers nationally and internationally.

### ***New, National Career Guidance Website and Related Master's Thesis***

The author is working on a national committee, funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and implemented via the Kennedy Krieger Institute's Office for Health, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, and Center for Diversity in Public Health Leadership Training, to design an evidence-based career guidance website to help the general public, and public health students in particular, to navigate the many diverse public health careers available to them.

This career website, like the *101+ Careers in Public Health* book, is grounded in the findings of the article, *Labour market competition for public health graduates in the United States: A comparison of workforce taxonomies with job postings before and during the COVID-19 pandemic*<sup>6</sup>. Related to this work is research conducted as part of a Master of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, which the author received in Feb. 2021, focusing on the creation of a community of practice for individuals providing career guidance to public health students, as well as the design of a survey to assess the resources available for career counselors who advise these students. A brief excerpt of the Master's thesis is below:

“As the number of public health students has grown, some concerns have been raised regarding their employment outcomes<sup>12</sup>. Tailored career guidance can improve career outcomes<sup>13</sup>, but this resource is not available to all public health students. A review of the websites of all 215 schools and programs accredited by the Council on Education in Public Health (CEPH) found fewer than half offered their own career services for graduate students, and while 76% of standalone graduate *schools* of public health offered their own career services, only 36% of graduate *programs* did. Additionally, there are 203 graduate programs that are not CEPH-accredited; and if even only a minority of accredited programs of public health offered career services, it seems even less likely that an unaccredited program might do so.

Publicly available guidance regarding public health careers is also difficult to find; a literature review found only four books about public health careers in the United States<sup>14-17</sup>, of which three are out of print. There were only four journal articles on public health career advising<sup>18-21</sup> and while there are thousands of Google results for “public health careers,” 90% of results on the first page of results are commercial advertising sites, primarily for online degree programs; and of the first 100 results, 50 were links to university admissions pages, 38 were advertising sites, blog articles, or similar links, and only 12 were for government agencies or nonprofits. Well-researched sites like WhatIsPublicHealth.org or the American Public Health Association did not appear in the first 10

pages of Google results in August, 2020. A new, freely available career guidance resource might help bridge this gap.”<sup>22</sup>

The new career guidance website will include career assessments similar to those described in the *101+ Careers in Public Health, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.*, book, career profiles of public health professionals, lists of professional associations, and additional informational materials to assist public health students and others with exploring and pursuing public health careers.

### ***Consortium of Public Health Career Guidance Professionals***

Finally, the author is serving as an advisor to a new, grassroots group of individuals providing guidance to public health students. Based on research conducted by Dr. Walter Zelman at California State University Los Angeles, we are building a community of practice for career guidance professionals who work with public health students. Our goal is to provide information-sharing and support as a community, but also to create a quick method for government agencies seeking to hire public health students to promote their career opportunities to public health students at the undergraduate and graduate levels nationally. No current association exists for this group, causing additional challenges for government agencies to hire public health students. This is especially relevant in light of the new \$7.4 billion set aside by the American Rescue Plan<sup>1</sup> to invest in the public health workforce, and the Biden Administration’s plan to create a Public Health AmeriCorps, since career advisors can be a key point of connection between government and new graduates.

### **Research Dissemination; Improving feedback loops between the workforce and academia**

Another goal of the valorization for this dissertation includes providing feedback to academia by providing insights from employment outcomes and employer feedback, with the goal of improving curriculum design. This includes attempts to predict employment trends for public health graduates for the future, as well as efforts to raise awareness of research techniques which can be used for public health academic institutions internationally. For example, the article in chapter 6 of the thesis is currently being used to advocate to include topics related to climate change as a competency requirement for the newest iteration of the Council on Education in Public Health (CEPH).

In addition to the articles listed in this dissertation, the author has also contribute to another article as third author<sup>23</sup>, focusing on the costs of a public health degree in comparison with earning potential, and contrasted the earnings of Master’s level public health graduates with those of other, similar disciplines such as social work, public administration, business, and nursing, demonstrating

that the financial returns on investment for the Master of Public Health may not be as high as some would hope, thus illustrating additional economic challenges with connecting public health graduates with employment in the government and nonprofit sectors and other fields which contribute to EPHOs. This additional research may be used to provide insights to academia on how to improve the relevance and even earning potential of public health graduates.

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