

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC HEALTH & NUTRITION

Description of the Field

At the start of this new millennium, the world faces both old and new public health challenges--the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the threat of bioterrorism, epidemics ranging from heart disease to cancer, the health of our increasingly elderly populations, the safety of our water and our food, and high-risk lifestyles, like smoking and substance abuse, which endanger our health (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health). Infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, have the ability to destroy lives, strain community resources, and even threaten nations. In today's global environment, new diseases have the potential to spread across the world in a matter of days, or even hours, making early detection and action more important than ever (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

All of these issues make careers in public health inherently multi-disciplinary and demand that professional work extends across the biological, quantitative, and social sciences. Public health professionals confront the most pressing diseases of our time--AIDS, cancer, and heart disease--by adding to the knowledge of their underlying structure and function. Because preventing disease is at the heart of public health, one must look towards the social sciences to better understand health-related behaviors and their societal influences--critical elements in educating and empowering people to make healthier lifestyle choices. (<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/about.html>)

Nutrition and epidemiologic aspects of nutrition can also affect public health. Nutrition policy and the evaluation of nutritional interventions are long-standing interests, particularly as they concern the populations of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the United States. Research ranges from molecular biology to human studies of cancer and heart disease, including the conduct of population based intervention trials. Techniques in biochemistry, physiology, biostatistics, epidemiology, and related fields are all relevant to health and nutrition. (<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/about.html>)

In addition, the need to understand the essential links between the social, physical, and economic environments and the health of individual patients and their families are vital. Areas of interest in public health include family practice, epidemiology and biometry, environmental and occupational health, nutrition, public health policy, and the social and economic aspects of the health care system.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

It is difficult to obtain ideal jobs in high-impact areas without at least five years experience or more. Jobs in the areas which one wants to focus in, whether health related or not, are a good place to start. When going international, it is best and usually required to have a working knowledge and experience outside of the field. Internships and jobs right out of school are good ways to achieve this experience. The health field is ever evolving, and one must evolve with it.

With the broad nature of a field like this the career paths are greatly varied. Food security specialists, health educators, and program managers are a sample of the professions associated with the field. Many of these career paths will lead to jobs around the world with varied needs and demands. Organizations like Family Health International, Save the Children and the World Health Organization all have many programs throughout the world to implement basic necessities in countries where resources are scarce.

According to the Harvard School of Public Health, nine public health career fields that many public health graduates have taken include:

- [Health care managers/administrators](#)
- [Epidemiologists](#)
- [Environmental health scientists](#)
- [Biostatisticians](#)
- [Public health practitioners](#)
- [Specialists in society, human development, and health](#)
- [International health specialists](#)
- [Nutritionists](#)
- [Biomedical scientists](#)

Demand

There is a big demand for professionals in many fields locally and abroad. The demand for qualified individuals is on the rise especially in impoverished lands like Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. New programs and initiatives are constantly arising through varied organizations; whether it is to start vision testing or an HIV/AIDS prevention program, the international demand is an omnipresent outcry that will not diminish.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

Experience in international affairs relating or not relating to the health fields is an invaluable advantage when choosing a career in Public Health and Nutrition. Some fields require at least a master's degree in public health, nutrition or a related field. Depending on the nature of the work or the area of expertise involved, some require a more focused PhD. The growing trend amongst employers seems to be an expertise not only in your field but also the region one plans to work in.

Sample Group of Employers

- Africare <http://www.africare.org/>
- American Friends Service Committee <http://www.afsc.org/>
- American Red Cross International <http://www.redcross.org/>
- American Refugee Committee <http://www.arcrelief.org/site/PageServer>
- Bread for the World <http://www.bread.org/>
- CEDPA <http://www.cedpa.org/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- Child Health Foundation <http://www.childhealthfoundation.org/>
- Christian Children's Fund <http://www.christianchildrensfund.org/>
- CONCERN Worldwide US Inc. <http://www.concernusa.org/>

- CARE <http://www.care.org/>
- Doctors of the World, Inc. <http://www.doctorsoftheworld.org/>
- Doctors Without Borders <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/>
- Gates Foundation <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/default.htm>
- Global Health Council <http://www.globalhealth.org/>
- Helen Keller International <http://www.hki.org/>
- Hunger Project <http://www.thp.org/>
- International Women's Health Coalition <http://www.iwhc.org/>
- Management Science of Health <http://www.msh.org/>
- Margaret Sanger Center International
- Mercy Corps <http://www.mercycorps.org/>
- Operation USA <http://www.opusa.org/>
- Partners in Health <http://www.pih.org/index.html>
- Partners of the Americas <http://www.partners.net/partners>
- Physician for Human Rights <http://www.phrusa.org/>
- Planning Assistance <http://www.planningassistance.org/>
- Project HOPE <http://www.projecthope.org/>
- Save the Children <http://www.savethechildren.org/>
- UNAIDS <http://www.unaids.org/en/>
- World Concern <http://www.worldconcern.org/>
- World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int/en/>

Future Challenges of the Profession

The future challenges are difficult to foresee. HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and control are at the top of everyone's list along with avian flu, malaria prevention and cancer research. Destitution and malnutrition are also challenges that are ever-present in the areas where these fields are most needed. There is a need to promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health by assisting individuals and communities to adopt healthy behaviors. Also, public health professional must collect and analyze data to identify community needs prior to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, policies and environments. This research may also serve as a resource to assist individuals, other professionals, or the community, and may administer fiscal resources for health education programs.

Resources for Additional Information

Associations

- American Public Health Association - http://www.apha.org/public_health/international.htm
- The American Society for Nutrition www.nutrition.org.
- Foreign Policy Association http://www.fpa.org/jobs_contact2423/jobs_contact.htm

Internet Resources

- Idealist <http://idealist.org/>
- International Nutrition Foundation - <http://www.inffoundation.org/>

- International Career Employment Weekly - <http://www.internationaljobs.org/contents.html>