

## TRENDS AND ISSUES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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### ABSTRACT

Public health practice in the twenty-first century is in a state of significant flux. Several trends are impacting the current practice of governmental public health and will likely have effects for many years to come. These trends are described as forces of change, which are changes that affect the context in which the community and its public health system operate. A public health problem, therefore, is a medical issue that affects a significant portion of a specific population. Some examples include chronic illnesses like Type 2 diabetes, infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, mental health challenges, and even motor vehicle accidents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with other government agencies, collect detailed information on the leading causes of death, injuries, illnesses, and risk factors for medical conditions to help keep track of these and other public health issues. Using this information, data analysts and statisticians can create raw statistics about diseases and mortality. Once a public health problem has been identified, medical experts and public health professionals band together to develop prevention techniques and educational materials that can be disseminated to the target population.

### INTRODUCTION

Public health is defined as the science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention. Public health, the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical and mental health, sanitation, personal hygiene, control of infectious diseases, and organization of health services. From the normal human interactions involved in dealing with the many problems of social life, there has emerged a recognition of the importance of community action in the promotion of health and the prevention and treatment of disease, and this is expressed in the concept of public health.

Today, public health encompasses areas as wide-ranging as epigenetics, chronic disease, the science of aging, mental health, disaster response, refugee health, injury prevention, and tobacco control. Microbiologists work to find vaccines while behavioral scientists research ways to change behaviors. Epidemiologists identify trends in health and illness, looking for links, causes, and interventions in areas such as infant mortality and infectious diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis. Environmental health scientists work to discover which foods prevent cancer, while health policy analysts

evaluate health insurance programs and make recommendations.

### Why public health is important?

Public Health studies plays a major role in fighting off the biggest killers of humans.

- 1) A fundamental quality of Public Health is its preventative nature. Prevention is far more effective and far less expensive than cure.
- 2) Public Health is important due to aiding and prolonging life. Through the prevention of health issues, individuals can spend more of their years in good health.
- 3) Public Health helps detect health issues as early as possible and responds appropriately to avoid the development of disease.
- 4) It is diverse and takes into account the health of the whole population, rather than focusing on health at an individual level.
- 5) Public Health is important as it ensures everyone is aware of health hazards through educational programmes, campaigns and through influencing government policies.
- 6) It is important because you are constantly building new skills and expanding as a person. This is due to the nature of the work promoting growth through day to day activities and taking part in major projects and campaigns.

- 7) Public Health is important because you are constantly striving to close the inequality gap between people and encourage equal opportunities for children, all ethnicities and genders.
- 8) Health is a human right and as a Public Health professional you are ensuring no one is disadvantaged regardless of their socio-economic background.
- 9) Public Health is important because you become the voice for individuals who have no voice and simply put, your influence on the improvement of someone's health can be a great satisfaction.

### Public Health in India – Trends and Challenges

Public health in India exhibits a peculiar trend. There is a serious gap in health infrastructure on the one hand and a double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases on the other. In spite of a compound annual growth rate of 15% in the healthcare industry, public health in India is full of paradoxes and challenges that seem to be insurmountable on the face of it. Statistics suggest that India has only 1.5 hospital beds per 1000 population. Ironically, health tourism is also on the rise with people from U.S and U.K coming to India because of the relatively low cost of treatment.

There will always be a gap in terms of healthcare resources (doctors, paramedical staff, hospital beds, technology, medicines, etc.) and the number of people who require health care in any form. Hence, preventive health care would be an alternative and effective strategy rather than consolidating resources on curative services. The case for preventive healthcare is made even stronger by the fact that almost 80% of all lifestyle diseases can be prevented by modifying health habits and detecting the possibility or the onset of a disease at a very early stage through preventive health screening. Moreover preventive healthcare also helps prevent premature death or debilitating disability through early detection of such chronic diseases.

### Budget Cuts

The economic downturn of 2008 coupled with budgetary showdowns and shutdowns have created a public health system that has suffered extensively from cuts. As a result, most organizations within the public health sector find themselves in a transition time that looks to remain. State and federal budget cuts affect everything from the implementation of laws that affect public health to the accreditation of public health agencies. Many public health positions have been eliminated entirely due to budgetary constraints, so many public health workers find themselves working in nontraditional settings outside government.

### Workforce Shortages

Numerous workforce shortages exist and look to continue, both due to budgetary pressures and waning involvement. Areas that deal with surveillance, nursing, lab work, environmental health and the like all need

more workers. In fact, The Association of Schools of Public Health predicts that approximately 250,000 more public health workers will need to enter the field by 2020 to maintain current rates of public health officials.

### Education

As technology continues to evolve at an almost breathless pace, the educational needs of public health workers evolve, too. From staying abreast of surveillance trends to utilizing new software to gather, analyze and interpret data, technology is seeing a regular uptick in a need for continuing education within the entire public health sector.

### Infrastructure Needs

Without a properly understood, functioning and executed infrastructure, public health officials cannot hope to deal with the vast health needs at the national, state and local levels. Both acute and ongoing threats must constantly be evaluated and responded to. Infrastructure is how the work of public health gets accomplished. Due mostly to budgetary cuts, the infrastructure of the United States' public health system is under duress. The need for a well-qualified, educated and capable workforce, the necessity of an up-to-date data gathering and analyzing system and operational agencies that assess public health needs and provide solutions are all part of what makes the public health system run, and these three areas are in transition, or in danger of being so underfunded that they are effectively eliminated.

### CONCLUSION

Public Health is an area of ongoing need whose struggles to meet those needs are different than those of days past. From the stress budget cuts place on workforces and infrastructure to the continual demands that technology places on educational needs, the future of public health will need to become more flexible and thrifty, especially if it hopes to remain vital. "As public health professionals, we are obligated to make sure that people have the most accurate information possible, which they can use to inform their personal decisions as well as decisions which stand to impact society at large," Maniar explains. "Public health professionals...can play a big role in nearly every step of the process—from research to innovation to practice."

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