

# The State of Training in Public Health

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Message from Director Steve Hicks, EdD

Office of Continuing Education at the Gillings School of Global Public Health

We have all weathered a tough year. Governments at all levels have experienced an economy-driven budget pain unheard of since the 1930's. Local health departments and the public health workforce are no exception. At a time when unemployment rates exceed nine percent nationally, health departments have had to lay off employees or freeze hiring while the demands for health department services have increased. The uncertainty about State budget deficit haunts every corner of our government.

For those of us who can remember back that far, we survived the recessions of 1973 and 1990, when unemployment rates were similar to those of today. The current prognosis is: we will survive this recession, but it will be a slow recovery. We will thrive again, but we may approach training and workforce development differently as a result.

This unusually adverse context affects both our overall organizational and workforce strategies, and we all feel the pain of these dramatic changes. Job instability and shifting work make it difficult to plan, commit to employees, and continue to develop our workforce.

A bright spot in training and workforce development is the Quality Improvement (QI) 101 course, sponsored by the North Carolina Center for Public Health Quality (NCCPHQ). NCCPHQ collaborated with state and local partners, including NCIPH, to provide training for teams using quality improvement methods and tools to make progress on real problems in their organizations. The QI 101 course has a waiting list of teams, and NCCPHQ is making more offerings of the course available to increase access for all local health departments.

As our State continues to grow, our needs for public health are growing as well. We need to have a workforce prepared to respond to the challenges of population health services in our local communities. Health departments are adjusting their strategic plans and looking to continue their services with fewer resources. This situation has had a significant impact on the training you need and your ability to gain access to the right training, at the right time, with minimal impact on your time away from work. As a result of these challenges, we recognize that your needs and priorities are changing rapidly.

Like you, we are doing everything within our control to adapt with constrained resources and sustain our capacity to serve you with high quality training programs. To do this we have had to reduce the number of total programs, and in some cases, raise our fees to respond to the economic realities and maintain our capabilities.

We realize that we can't be the single source for all your training needs. However, as you try to make the most of your training time and money, we hope you look to OCE and our partners AHEC, DPH, and NCCPHQ as valued resources for finding the right training and development opportunities. If we can't provide the program you need, we will help you find relevant training for your profession. Our Public Health Academy website ([www.ncpublichealthacademy.org](http://www.ncpublichealthacademy.org)) and Asksphere database ([www.asksphere.org](http://www.asksphere.org)) are outstanding tools you can use to find and plan your professional development

activities. You can count on us to provide outstanding quality nursing programs; combine new technology and classroom models to save travel costs; support State of Practice (SOP) environmental health programs with the Division of Environmental Health, and provide program support services with our partners the Area Health Education Centers, the Division of Public Health, and The UNC Friday Center for Continuing Education.

There is something that you can do. Plan for your development opportunities and be ready when resources become available. You can:

- Create your own individual development plan.
- Create a workforce development plan for your unit, department or health department.
- If you have completed accreditation, consult your organization's strategic plan and workforce development plan.

We are committed to providing educational opportunities and guidance for you to continue to develop your public health competencies. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to help you achieve your development goals.

Sincerely,

Steve Hicks