



February 8, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20201

Carole Johnson  
Administrator  
Health Resources & Services Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Secretary Becerra and Administrator Johnson:

As the association representing the second largest sector of the governmental public health workforce—the environmental health workforce—we are writing to request that the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) ensures that the **environmental health workforce** is included in the **Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program**. Furthermore, the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 should include at least **\$100 million for the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program**. This program was authorized in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 as part of the PREVENT Pandemics Act and is essential to ensuring the public health workforce needed for the future.

In the U.S., environmental health professionals working at health departments have the responsibility to address environment-related threats and determinants of health. Environmental health professionals form a critical component of the public health delivery system, providing services to curb environmental health threats and prevent adverse health outcomes. They assist communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disease outbreaks and both natural and anthropogenic disasters. Environmental health professionals are strategically positioned to identify and intervene to prevent public health and environmental health threats from affecting local populations.

The environmental health workforce reduces and prevents illness to individuals, families, and communities caused by physical, chemical, and biological agents found in our environment. Environmental health professionals are scientifically trained and certified to identify and mitigate environmental dangers as well as promote alternatives. They are on the front lines of public health handling threats such as environmental inequities (e.g., lead exposure), climate change

(e.g., drought), food safety (e.g., baby food), safe drinking water (e.g., PFOS), and clean air (e.g., ozone).

The environmental health workforce was struggling prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2016 and 2019, local health departments lost 21% of their workforce, over 2000 environmental health professionals. Many public health and environmental health managers are concerned with recruiting, maintaining and retaining a sufficient workforce. Low pay, a lack of resources and long workhours pressure environmental health professionals into leaving for better work opportunities. Enhanced recruitment efforts and incentives are essential for preserving and building the environmental health workforce.

Being part of the public health workforce, many environmental health managers believe that environmental health would be included in the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program. Since public health nurses, epidemiologists, and laboratory professionals were included, the environmental health workforce assumed it would as well. Yet they have received no assurances that their profession would be included, nor excluded for that matter.

The environmental health workforce, the second largest public health workforce, should be included in the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program. HRSA has the authority and ability to include these professionals.

Please make certain that the second largest component of the public health workforce is not denied its eligibility for loan repayment. It is essential that the nation maintains a robust environmental health workforce to ensure the public is protected from environmental-borne outbreaks.

In Health,



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