

The Oregon Public Health Corps: A Workforce Pathway Program to Public Health Careers for Undergraduate Peer Health Educators

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Abstract

In 2020, the University of Oregon developed a student workforce pathway program that rapidly trained and deployed undergraduate students to assist state and local health authorities with COVID-19. The “Corona Corps” included more than 200 individual students. In 2023, with funding from the Oregon Health Authority, the renamed “Oregon Public Health Corps” helps health authorities prepare for the next public health crisis, all while providing students a pathway to health and public health careers.

This poster explores how the Oregon Public Health Corps not only provided support to the state and local public health agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic but also supported the public health workforce shortage in general and paved a way forward for undergraduate students to fill key roles within public health agencies.

The Problem

Nationwide

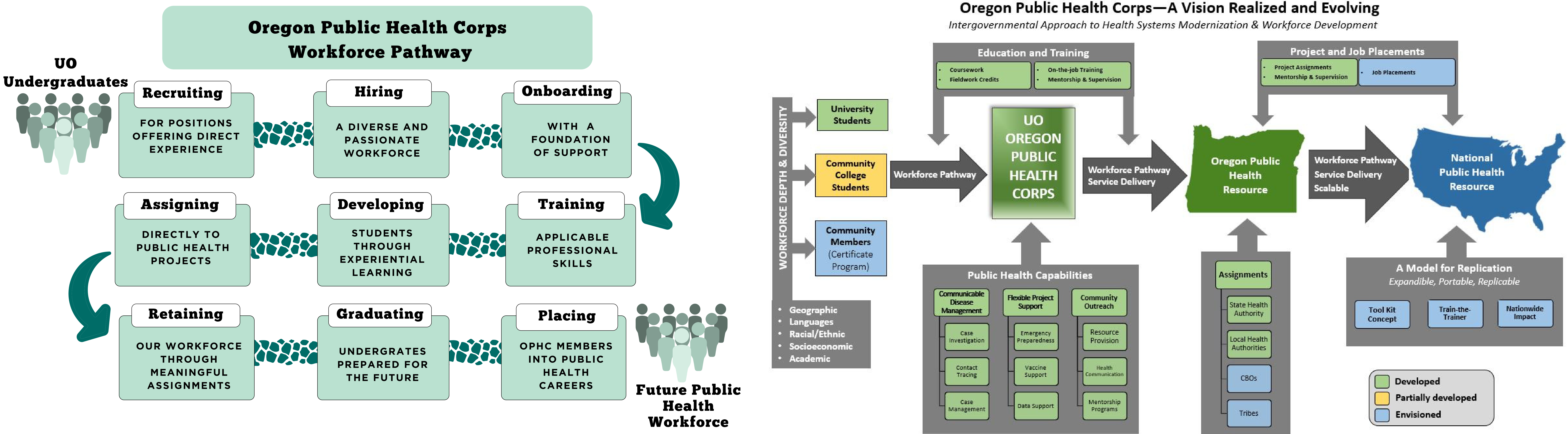
The public health workforce in the US has been experiencing a steady decline in personnel for many years. From 2012 to 2019, the public health workforce decreased by almost 10% across all states, from 101,619 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to 91,540 FTEs.

In Oregon

The numbers in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest are similar. The Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials reported in the 2021 Oregon’s Local Public Health Workforce Report that “modernization of the public health system in Oregon is based on the recognition that public health has been severely underfunded and understaffed for decades.”

Carlin, et.al, State of the Public Health Workforce: Trends and Challenges Leading Up to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Journal of Public Health Management and Practice 27(1);p 92-93, January/February 2021.
Oregon’s Local Public Health Workforce Report, 2021, Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO)

Methods and Vision for the Program



The Oregon Public Health Corps enables undergraduate students who are engaging in their field of study to gain practical experience and develop essential employment skills. Students are recruited into the Corps workforce pathway to serve both their immediate community and the broader area where they live and learn, applying their acquired knowledge to real-world events. Throughout their time in the Corps, students receive training and support from professional staff and assignments into health and public health roles, ensuring they are well-prepared and highly competitive for postgraduate opportunities.

The Oregon Public Health Corps is designed to be flexible and replicable. The workforce can flex to include not only university students, but also community college students and even community members, with a “tool kit” approach to training. This provides a diverse workforce in many ways. Once the workforce is trained to perform the basic public health capabilities, they can be placed into assignments within any number of local or state government projects, or within community based organizations, tribes, etc. This entire program could ultimately be replicated across the country through college and university networks such as the Big Ten or others. The University of Oregon has realized most of this vision, but national replication remains.

The Virus that Started it All

COVID-19 response prepared our workforce and made a difference!

Contact Monitoring (July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021)
11,900 Community Contacts; 931 UO Contacts
= 12,831 + 1,148 post Lane County Public Health contracts
= **~14,000 contacts supported!**

Case Management for UO Students (September 2020-April 2023)
Over 6,125 cases over 2.5 years
116 post daily record keeping
= **6,241** UO students supported with resources
A total of more than **20,000** individuals supported over three years!

Capabilities and Accomplishments

Our Students Did A Lot!

- COVID response continued, added case investigation
- OHA COVID vaccine clinic support
- Project Help resource calls to COVID patients
- Second dose of measles vaccine follow-up due to increase in measles cases in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest
- Middle school mentorship program
- Pertussis case investigation, contact tracing, case management
- Tuberculosis exposure investigation and education
- Oregon Health Authority (OHA) placements

Mini Case Studies

#1: Working Within OHA, the State Health Authority

- Health Security, Preparedness and Response (HSPR) projects
 - Medical Surge Operations, including CONOPS for medical sheltering, strategic supply placement, distances between hospitals
 - Updated State Emergency Registry of Volunteers in Oregon (SERV-OR) contacts
 - Inventoried and repacked state mobile hospital (Salem, OR)

#2: Tuberculosis Exposure Investigation and Education

- Exposure investigations using the Concentric Circles Model
- Followed-up with those exposed for testing and TB education