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Public health manager

Public health managers make a vital contribution to supporting the health of the public.

Overview

Public health managers work across all three 'domains' of public health [1] (health improvement, health protection and healthcare public health).

They are experienced and qualified in public health and management, and they work with others across the health system to lead and implement programmes of work that have a focus on public health. Their areas of work can be immensely varied depending on the organisation they work in. For example, they may be: managing and supporting teams; providing public health expertise and advice to organisations; or commissioning services and managing public health budgets.

In England, the main employer is local government [2], but other employers include the NHS [3], the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities [4] and UK Health Security Agency [5] (UKHSA), and the voluntary (or 'third') sector [6].

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Download transcript [9]

Public health manager roles

Here are just a few of the types of public health manager roles. Actual job titles are likely to vary between organisations, as can be seen from the examples in the pay and conditions section.

- Health protection specialist
- Health improvement principal
- Commissioning manager
- Public health principal

Shakti Dookeran

Population health service manager

> While I do not work directly with the public, I do have an important part to play in ensuring that the voice of public health is heard, which requires me to present a convincing argument when relaying the evidence.

Read Shakti's story [10]

Health protection specialist

As a health protection specialist, you'll be developing plans for protecting the health of the local population (eg from health problems that might arise as a result of extreme weather events like heat waves and floods to outbreaks such as pandemic flu).

You'll be working with other organisations to support how services need to respond most effectively in the case of an emergency that has a potential to threaten people's health (such in the case of severe cold or hot weather, fires, road or rail accidents, incidents at major events). These are known as emergency planning exercises.

You'll be providing specialist advice and support on infection prevention and control to colleagues, patients, the public and organisations. For instance, you might be giving advice on wearing personal protective equipment, dealing with chemical spills and spills of bodily fluids, good hygiene practice, cleanliness within the healthcare or work environment and safe disposal of waste such as needles and sharps.

> There are a variety of entry requirements, training and qualifications that may be required to work as a public health manager.

You'll support the development of evidence-based quality standards for infection prevention and control to help prevent the spread of infections (eg infections like Covid-19, MRSA, Norovirus and Salmonella).

You'll assist with the preparation of reports on the performance and quality of local systems for protecting health (eg the numbers and types of people who have taken up immunisation and screening programmes in a given area).

Health protection specialists require a Master's degree in Public Health or equivalent, and significant public health experience. Often, they are registered nurses and have relevant qualifications in areas such as infection, communicable disease control, emergency planning, teaching and assessing.

Health improvement principal

As a health improvement principal, you may work in across a wide variety of public health

areas and use your specialist knowledge and skills to lead and plan health improvement services and initiatives. Often, the results of your work may not be seen for many months or years. For example, there has been a reduction in the incidence of some smoking-related cancers over the last 30 years because of greater awareness of the risks of smoking, the increase in non-smoking environments and changes to tobacco advertising. It's likely that public health professionals such as health improvement principals have been involved in some way to bring about such change.

As a health improvement principal, you could be involved in:

- working with a range of individuals, organisations and communities to help reduce the incidence of obesity in a local area through events, awareness raising and having access to healthy food locally
- developing plans and strategies to help increase access to those requiring mental health services and reducing the stigma associated with some mental health conditions
- leading on the commissioning of services and initiatives that can help to reduce drinking at dangerous levels

As a health improvement principal, you'll be a highly trained and experienced individual. Some of the particular skills you'll need include:

- communicating complex information in clear and understandable ways
- interpreting and analysing complex and often conflicting information, for example about the effectiveness of a public health programme
- managing budgets and working with colleagues to determine the best use of often limited resources
- evaluating services and interventions to determine how effective they have been

Health improvement principals require a Master's qualification in Public Health or equivalent, and preferably a management qualification. Ideally, they will be working towards registration with the UK Public Health Register [11] (UKPHR) at an appropriate level.

Commissioning manager

As a commissioning manager, you'll be an expert in policy, identifying and promoting best practice and developing services. You'll be responsible for selecting and hiring providers of health and social care services for a particular group of the population. The chosen providers will need to be able to support positive changes to people's health in a particular geographical area, for example by providing services to support those with mental health needs, such as drop in clinics, counselling support, support in applying for jobs).

Here are just some of the additional and varied tasks that commissioning managers might be involved in, depending on the areas of health they are working in their organisation:

- determining annual plans for how services will be purchased
- ensuring that robust contracts for services are negotiated, agreed and that the delivery of those services are effectively managed
- managing budgets and working with colleagues in Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and local authorities to ensure that available resources are used to best effect
- staff supervision and management

Commissioning managers are educated to degree-level or equivalent, may have a qualification in Nursing or Social Work, and will have significant experience as a manager or commissioner in the area of health concerned.

Public health principal

Public health principals work in a number of public health areas, providing highly specialist knowledge, leadership, strategic direction, policy advice, and support. They are involved in developing long-term strategic plans for the public health areas for which they are responsible, for example:

- developing a substance and alcohol misuse strategy for a town, city or, region to support reduced access to GP services and hospital admissions
- helping to reduce health inequalities by purchasing services for specific groups (such as access to diet, fitness and exercise services specifically for people from poorer or socio-economic backgrounds that people from wealthier backgrounds may find easier to access)
- developing care pathways (coordinating the care of people with specific conditions within a given time frame)

Public health principals require a Master's qualification in Public Health or equivalent, and preferably a management qualification. Ideally, they will also be working towards registration with the United Kingdom Public Health Register [11] (UKPHR) as a specialist.

Want to find out more?

- Find out more about the skills and interests needed by a public health manager [12]
- Find out more about the training and development for a public health manager [13]

Pay and conditions

Pay and conditions of employment are likely to vary depending on the employer. For more information please visit our pay and benefits page [14].

Example salaries:

Public health strategist - health protection and tobacco control: £50,565-£52,560 (London Borough of Lewisham, 2017)

Public health programme manager: £36,171-£47,175 (Thurrock Council, 2017)

Public health commissioning officer: £40,086-£42,876 (London Borough of Merton, 2017)

Health protection specialist: £42,053 (South West Commissioning Support Unit, 2014)

Public health lead commissioner: £43,102 - £46,312 pa (Leicester City Council, 2014)

Health improvement principal/strategic commissioning manager: £45,602 - £49,834pa (East Sussex County Council, 2014)

Commissioning manager – mental health and wellbeing: £45,707 - £56,504pa (NHS Nene Clinical Commissioning Group [15])

Public health principal: £55,185pa (Surrey County Council, 2014)

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Where the role can lead

Public health managers can gain experience and additional qualifications to work in a specialised area in public health. Example roles are senior public health development manager and screening and immunisation manager. These roles include working across large populations and, in some instances, in different countries.

Public health managers can also apply to train to become a public health specialist [16].

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Job market and vacancies

England

In England, public health managers are employed primarily in local authorities, although others are found in the NHS, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the UK Health Security Agency and the third sector. The number of public health managers in England is difficult to estimate as the data are not routinely collected and individuals work in a range of organisations. A report on the public health workforce (2014) [17] estimated that there were between 600 and 1200 public health managers although there was no information available from some employing organisations.

Scotland

In Scotland the main employer of public health managers is the NHS (in local NHS Health Boards, NHS Health Scotland and Community Health Partnerships or Health and Social Care Partnerships). A report on the public health workforce in Scotland (2015) [18] estimated that there were at least 970 public health managers and practitioners in the NHS, of which 850 are working at AfC [19] Band 5 or higher.

Job vacancies:

- Civil Service Job Search (Gov.UK) [20]
- Universal Jobmatch (Gov.UK) [21]
- Local Government Jobs (UK) [22]
- Scottish Local Government Jobs [23]
- Local Government Jobs in Northern Ireland [24]
- Welsh Local Government Jobs [25]
- NHS Jobs [26]
- NHS Scotland Recruitment [27]
- NHS Education for Scotland [28]
- Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland [29]
- Public Health Wales (NHS) Recruitment and Employment [30]
- Public Sector Jobs in Wales [31]
- Royal Society for Public Health [32]

Further information

- Royal Society of Public Health [33]

Other roles that may interest you

- Public health nurse [34]
- Public health practitioner [35]
- Project manager [36]
- Practice manager [37]

Partner logos

Local Government Association

[38]
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RSPH
ROYAL SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH
VISION, VOICE AND PRACTICE [39]

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-public-health/what-public-health
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