

Public health practitioner

Public health practitioners can have a huge influence on the health and wellbeing of individuals, groups, communities and populations.

Working life

Public health practitioners work in many places and in many areas of public health. They may support healthy lifestyle programmes, helping individuals and groups to stop smoking and take more exercise. They may work on immunisation programmes and screening, based in local communities or in public health teams specialising in health protection.

Some public health practitioners may play an important role in national and local health campaigns. Others may work in the public health knowledge and intelligence teams in local government organisations and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities [1].

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Public health practitioner roles

Public health practitioner roles differ greatly in the work they focus on and in their specific job titles. Here are just some examples of the types of roles public health practitioners do.

- Teenage pregnancy co-ordinator
- Smoking cessation advisor
- Substance misuse worker
- Public health nutritionist
- Health improvement practitioner
- Advanced health improvement practitioner
- Health improvement practitioner (specialist)
- Health improvement practitioner (advanced)
- Health protection practitioner

Vanessa McFarlane

Health improvement coordinator

Making sure that adequate resources are available is part of what I do, but creating services that meet the needs of vulnerable young people is key to them accessing the service and this is the priority.

Read Vanessa's story [5]

Teenage pregnancy co-ordinator

As a teenage pregnancy co-ordinator you are likely to be responsible for supporting the targets defined in your local Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. You'll engage with local people to develop and deliver projects and activities, particularly relating to sex and relationships education. This might be, for example, by providing increased access to contraceptive and sexual health advice in schools and community centres. You'll also analyse information about the success of services, and make recommendations for the development of annual local work plans in relation to sexual health.

Teenage pregnancy co-ordinators are likely to require a Youth Work qualification (level 3) or a relevant health-related qualification, plus specific training in sexual health. They also require experience of working with young people in the field of sexual health or teenage pregnancy.

Smoking cessation adviser

Working as a smoking cessation adviser, you're likely to be involved in delivering stop-smoking advice in one-to-one situations, in groups, or over the telephone. You'll be providing information on all treatments currently available, behavioural support techniques, and coping strategies. You may manage a caseload, referring to others for specialist advice as appropriate. You'll be involved in planning and monitoring the care of your clients, and then evaluate the impact of your work. You'll need to keep accurate, confidential, and up-to-date records for all your clients. Working with other local providers of health, social care and voluntary services, you'll be passionate about how stopping smoking can make a positive difference to people's lives.

A smoking cessation adviser is likely to require education up to GCSE level or equivalent, and experience of therapeutic service. Other qualifications in counselling, education, social work may be desirable.

Substance misuse worker

As a substance misuse worker, you'll be responsible for providing appropriate information and support to people who have drug and alcohol issues, and to their families. This may include counselling, motivational interviewing, alternative therapies, and therapeutic interventions relating to drug use. You may work in many different environments, including schools and clients' homes, may work with individuals and groups, and may deal with clients of different ages and from different backgrounds. You'll be a strong communicator, and able to establish positive working relationships with your clients and their clients' families to develop trust, confidence, and acceptance. You'll take a creative and innovative approach to delivering the services you provide. You'll also work with other agencies to ensure your clients and their families have access to a range of services. You'll also keep accurate, confidential, and up-to-date records for all your clients.



A substance misuse worker is likely to require education up to GCSE level or equivalent, and experience of working with people with substance misuse problems. Other qualifications in counselling, education, social work may be desirable.

Public health nutritionist

As an expert in food and nutrition, your work as a public health nutritionist is to develop and evaluate community nutrition services that can help to bring about positive changes to people's lives. Your day-to-day work is likely to be very varied and could include:

- carrying out research and using scientific knowledge to provide advice and guidance about the positive and negative effects of food on health and wellbeing.
- contributing to local policies and strategies in relation to diet-related diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular [6] disease and diabetes
- identifying opportunities for promoting health through nutrition (eg making sure children in schools and the elderly in residential homes have access to food that provides good nutrition
- training others (eg community workers, professional groups) in promoting the health benefits of good nutrition in communities to support positive behaviour change
- organising food and nutrition campaigns for example, in food stores or via the media
- monitoring and evaluating the impact of your work, and ensuring it aligns with local and national policies

Public health nutritionists have a degree in nutrition or dietetics plus equivalent practical experience in public health nutrition.

Health improvement practitioner

As a health improvement practitioner, you'll contribute to local programmes which can help to bring about lifestyle and behaviour change (eg stopping smoking, diet and exercise). You may also be involved in working with specific groups, which will vary depending on the role and its locality. You may, for example, be providing specialist services specifically aimed at young people, the elderly, people with mental health conditions, or the LGBTI population. Your work could include:

- providing advice on health improvement to support the care and education of clients
- training staff
- working with external agencies, to influence how they can help improve population health
- keeping up-to-date public health information
- maintaining systems for collecting data about the health of their clients
- creating publications and reports about health improvement information and initiatives

They also usually have a degree in public health or a related subject or equivalent knowledge acquired through training, extended courses and experience.

Advanced health improvement practitioner

Working as an advanced health improvement practitioner, you'll be committed to supporting individuals and groups to bring about positive changes in their behaviour to improve their health. You'll also work to reduce health inequalities (differences in the health of people or groups due to social, geographical, biological or other factors). Some of the kinds of work you might be involved in include:

- planning, delivering and developing specialist services (such as smoking cessation, sexual health)
- communicating important public health messages and marketing their service to relevant groups and communities
- working closely with other agencies to achieve their aims
- monitoring and evaluating the impact and outcomes of health improvement programmes and initiatives

Health improvement practitioner (specialist)

As a health improvement practitioner (specialist) you'll be working in a lead role for a particular area of health improvement (for example, specific services targeted at men, women or young people, or a particular condition such as diabetes or dementia). Here are just some of the kinds of work you could be involved in:

Public health practitioners work with people from a range of organisations including public sector, voluntary sector, and private sector.

- working with individuals, groups, communities and organisations to influence and improve population health
- contributing to the development of local health improvement programmes including how they are monitored and evaluated
- giving presentations and training on topics such as child protection, sexual health, healthy eating
- providing specialised health improvement advice to support the care and education of individuals, groups and communities
- training, supervising and managing staff
- developing publications and reports on public health

They have knowledge of public health acquired through a relevant degree, plus specific public health improvement knowledge acquired through training, experience or qualifications.

Health improvement practitioner (advanced)

As a health improvement practitioner (advanced) you'll be the lead specialist for your own health improvement area (for example, a programme that helps to reduce the incidence of falls, strokes, heart attacks and diabetes in older people; a programme that provides specific services in a socially deprived area such as an inner city suburb; or a programme that supports those with mental health problems).

You'll identify the priorities for health improvement programmes across a range of organisations and community groups, and you'll develop long-term plans for health improvement. Some of your work could include:

- promoting the involvement of the public in the development and evaluation of your public health improvement activities
- evaluate the effectiveness of your activities by undertaking detailed public health audits and public surveys, and analysing the results

- using evidence to provide highly specialised advice to organisations and communities
- communicating sensitive information (for example relating to child protection, sexual health)

It's likely you'll also be a budget holder, and be involved in all aspects of staff recruitment and management.

They have highly developed specialist knowledge of public health, acquired through a relevant degree plus a Master's qualification or equivalent training or experience.

Health protection practitioner

As a health protection practitioner you'll receive notifications about communicable diseases (such as hospital-acquired infections, measles, TB, flu), and then interpret, prioritise and act on them. You'll work directly with consultants in health protection to identify, investigate and monitor outbreaks of infection or communicable disease in the community, and contribute to the collection and evaluation of data about the outbreaks. Other aspects of your work could include:

- providing advice on patient care, practices and procedures to manage incidents or outbreaks, and helping to evaluate the measures taken to control them
- providing specialist advice based on best evidence to other healthcare professionals (such as general practitioners, practice nurses, community nurses, health visitors, hospital nurses and clinicians and care home staff, environmental health professionals and social services staff) to improve the management of cases of communicable disease and to improve the prevention and control of infections in the community.
- giving advice on chemical incidents, communicable disease control, immunisation and vaccination; health protection matters

Health protection practitioners should have a degree in a relevant subject or an equivalent level of experience of working in a specialist area. They should be a registered general nurse, allied healthcare professional or environmental health practitioner. They may have additional relevant qualifications, in, eg, project management, training and development.

Want to find out more?

- Find out more about entry requirements for public health practitioner [7]
- Find out more about skills needed by public health practitioners [8]
- Find out more about training and development for public health practitioners [9]

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Pay and conditions

Pay and conditions:

Pay and conditions of employment are likely to vary depending on the employer. For more information please view our pay and benefits page [10].

Working hours will vary depending on the precise nature of the role. For example healthy lifestyle groups may be held in the evening so that working people can easily attend.

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Where the role can lead

Public health practitioners have many opportunities to develop their careers. For example, if the practitioner has learnt how to support people stopping smoking they may be able to undertake additional training to be able to administer certain nicotine replacement therapies. They may also gain additional broader skills to help people in reducing their alcohol intake or improving their mental health. Practitioners may also develop their skills and expertise through more senior practitioner roles or go into management, service lead roles or leadership positions.

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Job market and vacancies

England

In England, public health practitioner jobs are found in local authorities, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the NHS and in the voluntary sector.

Scotland

In Scotland, the main employers of public health practitioners are local NHS Health Boards, NHS Health Scotland, Community Health Partnerships and Health and Social Care Partnerships.

Where to look for job vacancies:

- Civil Service Job Search (Gov.UK) [11]
- Universal Jobmatch (Gov.UK) [12]
- Local Government Jobs (UK) [13]
- Scottish Local Government Jobs [14]
- Local Government Jobs in Northern Ireland [15]
- Welsh Local Government Jobs [16]
- NHS Jobs [17]
- NHS Scotland Recruitment [18]
- NHS Education for Scotland [19]
- Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland [20]
- Public Health Wales (NHS) Recruitment and Employment [21]
- Public Sector Jobs in Wales [22]

Recruiting for values

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the NHS Constitution apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

Find out more about NHS values [23]. [24]

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Further information

- United Kingdom Public Health Register (UKPHR) [25]

Other roles that may interest you

- Public health nurse [26]
- School nurse [27]
- Health visitor [28]
- Project manager [29]

Partner logos

Faculty of Public Health

[30]

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Local Government Association

[31]

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Links

- [1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-health-improvement-and-disparities>
[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/privacy-and-cookies/#CookieDeclarationChangeConsentChange>
[3] <https://www.youtube.com/NHSCareers> [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/resources/transcript-ben-cooper> [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/roles-public-health/public-health-practitioner/real-life-story-vanessa-mcfarlane>
[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Cardiovascular> [7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/public-health-practitioner/entry-requirements-public-health-practitioner>
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[22] <https://uk.jobted.com/?l=wales>

- [23] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>
- [24] <https://www.healthcareers.lampuat64-3.rroom.net/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>
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- [32] <https://www.rsph.org.uk/>