

CAHD: A Way Forward for California's Public Health Workforce Pipeline

Facing an aging local public health workforce with high levels of burnout & reduced state & federal funding, the Center for Health Leadership & Impact (CHLI) created the **California Academic Health Department (CAHD) program to strengthen local health departments' (LHDs) workforce pipelines.**



26% of public health staff are 55 & older & slated to retire in coming years*



71% of public health workers experience at least one symptom of burnout*

From 2023-2025, the CAHD program placed & supported **20 public health students & recent graduates in LHDs across 6 counties** to fill important roles & build public health career pathways. CAHD leverages the proven academic health department model, collaborating between academia & public health practice to align curricula with real-world challenges.

*de Beaumont Foundation and Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey Data Dashboard. July 2025.

CAHD delivered results

Note: 13-16 participants responded to survey questions.

Created career pathways

100%

of participants said CAHD contributed to their professional development & influenced their career goals

100%

of participants in a 12-month program were employed in public health roles within a year of the program ending

Strengthened public health skills

100%

of participants improved skills to work across sectors, address social determinants of health, & engage community representative voices

Filled important gaps in public health



65% of participants identified as first generation college students



50% of placements were in health shortage areas

Program satisfaction was high

94%

of participants were satisfied with the program

&

would recommend the program to others

CAHD equipped me with the tools, guidance, & support needed to confidently navigate the early stages of my public health career.
-Participant

CAHD positively impacted LHDs

All LHDs said participants positively impacted their areas of work.



Participants supported LHDs in: event planning & facilitation; project & data management; technological improvements; updating & developing reports; and preparing & presenting presentations.

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It is a great program and a wonderful way to generate interest in the public health field as well as empower students to find their role within the field.
- LHD Supervisor

100%

of LHDs were satisfied with their experience & would recommend the program

88%

of participants would recommend their LHD host site to future participants

CHLI built strong partnerships for recruitment

CHLI's robust network of 37 California schools & programs of public health led to improved recruitment & an increase in interest & number of applicants in just 3 years



2x as many application downloads

3x as many completed applications

An adaptive model to strengthen public health

The CAHD program office adapted to local realities & adopted an iterative design that ensured satisfaction & effectiveness.



Examples of adaptations:

- Adjusted cohort timing to align with other academic health department programs;
- Engaged third-party employment partner to streamline hiring process;
- Experimented with different program models to meet needs

This flexible model, replicable across regions and settings, demonstrates a promising pathway for strengthening the public health workforce.

