



A Master of Public Health Degree for the 21st Century

Key Considerations
Design Features
Critical Content of the Core

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In anticipation of the centennial of the landmark Welch-Rose Report of 1915, the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) created the Framing the Future Task Force to undertake a broad review of education in public health. The Task Force in turn convened a Master of Public Health Expert Panel, composed of CEPH-accredited school of public health and public health program representatives and practice partners, to provide guidance for an overall reframing of the MPH degree. ASPPH has a long-standing commitment to strengthening the MPH degree through: support for school and program accreditation, the development of competency models, and the certification of graduates.

The Master of Public Health degree has been the cornerstone of education in public health since the Welch-Rose Report led to the establishment of U.S. schools of public health. As the centennial of the report approaches, key considerations, design features and critical content of the core for the MPH need to be updated so that the rationale of the degree is well defined, the degree fits well into the evolving spectrum of education in public health, and MPH graduates are well prepared to deal with the expanding context and content of their public health roles in the 21st century.

This report from the MPH Expert Panel is organized into three sections, each of which contains a set of assertions intended to guide the purposeful transition to a 21st century model of public health education at the professional master's level.

Key Considerations for a 21st Century MPH Degree

Design Features of a 21st Century MPH Degree

Critical Content of the Core for a 21st Century MPH Degree

Key Considerations for a 21st Century MPH Degree

- The MPH degree will continue to grow in value and in enrollment during the 21st century as societies, organizations, and individuals increasingly focus on population health and health care as key concerns.
- The MPH degree should be clearly distinguished from the BSPH and the DrPH, as the BSPH becomes an entry-level degree in the field and the DrPH emerges as a high-level degree focused on public health leadership and management.
- MPH education should be rigorous, applied, and skills-based to differentiate it from the BSPH and to ensure that graduates will be well prepared to function effectively in their chosen specializations and work settings.

- The MPH should be designed as an advanced degree focused on specialist education that is directly responsive to the needs of students and their prospective employers.
- The content delivered in MPH curricula should be regularly aligned with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that employers expect in graduates.
- A decreasing percentage of MPH graduates will be employed in traditional public health agencies while an increasing percentage will be employed in a wide range of settings including other government agencies, health care delivery organizations, insurers, drug and device makers, and others.
- Public health is inherently interdisciplinary and interprofessional and, thus, MPH graduates must be prepared to function in increasingly interdisciplinary and interprofessional roles and settings.
- MPH education should be competency-based and competencies should be updated on a regular basis.
- A new design for the MPH degree should guide the development of new accreditation criteria in close consultation with the field's accrediting agencies.
- Public health has an essential set of values that must continue to be transmitted during the MPH degree experience.
- The MPH degree is a professional degree so it is important that MPH education continue to have strong connections to applied public health practice, broadly defined.
- Global health is public health and includes both domestic and international issues, so global health perspectives and content should be covered in all MPH degrees.

Design Features of a 21st Century MPH Degree

- The MPH degree should be based on a rigorous, structured, and carefully sequenced curriculum that may require prerequisite learning.
- The MPH degree should offer in-depth education in concentration areas that are responsive to the interests of students, the strengths of the institution, and the needs of employers.

- The minimum number of credit hours for an MPH degree should not be increased beyond the current minimum of 42. To do otherwise would contradict rising concerns about length of time to degree and tuition costs.
- Accredited schools and programs should have flexibility in designing many aspects of their MPH degree, including prerequisites and experience requirements, core design, and concentrations.
- An in-depth concentration should be a distinguishing element of a 21st century MPH degree.
 - Concentration curricula should be designed to provide the rigorous, in-depth, skills-based education that students are seeking and employers are demanding.
 - Concentration requirements should consist of at least four courses beyond the introductory level that are appropriately sequenced and layered and that are not parts of the practicum or the culminating experience.
 - Concentration options can and should vary across schools and programs, and they need not include in-depth training in each of the five traditional core fields.
 - Concentrations should be offered based on the expertise available in the school or program, the needs of local and target-market employers, and the demands of applicants and students.
 - Concentrations may include options that are within traditional disciplines, options that cross disciplines, and options that address emerging topics and fields.
 - In some settings and for some students a generalist degree may be the most appropriate “concentration” for MPH graduates.
- The common element of all MPH degrees should be a well-designed core that covers critical and interdisciplinary content in foundational areas of public health.
 - The foundational areas of public health should be congruent across the degree spectrum from the baccalaureate to the MPH to the DrPH, with the depth of learning and the development of abilities increasing appropriately along the spectrum.
 - The critical content to be covered in the core element of all MPH degrees is delineated in the final section of this report.
 - The core should typically comprise no more than a third of the content or credits of a newly designed MPH degree but may be more, depending on student interests, local needs, and institutional orientation.
 - The core can be delivered as a series of integrated learning experiences rather than as a set of distinct courses in the traditional core disciplines.

- The practicum and the culminating experience in the MPH degree should be considered primarily as elements of the concentration rather than as elements of the core.
 - The practicum and culminating experience elements provide opportunities for applied learning, interdisciplinary content, and integration of concepts and skills.
 - The design, duration, and learning objectives of both elements should be clearly specified.
- The MPH degree should have distinct and defined learning objectives for each of its major elements, including core, concentration, practicum, and culminating experience.
 - The learning objectives for the MPH core should be similar across all accredited MPH degree programs. The number and scope of these objectives should be limited in keeping with the specialty emphasis of the redesigned MPH degree and with the defined percentage of the curriculum devoted to the core, and they should be focused on learning at the level of knowledge and comprehension.
 - The concentration learning objectives for a particular MPH degree should assess learning in terms of knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis in a defined specialty area.
 - Learning objectives for the practicum and the culminating experience should be linked primarily to the concentration rather than to the core, and they should be focused on higher levels of learning including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Critical Content of the Core for a 21st Century MPH Degree

The common core of the MPH degree should educate graduates in these foundational areas of public health:

- History and philosophy of public health as well as its core values, concepts, functions, and leadership roles
- Concepts, methods, and tools of public health data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and the evidence-based reasoning and informatics approaches that are essential to public health practice

- Systems thinking regarding the dynamic interactions among sectors, organizations, and actors with which public health professionals interact to achieve health improvements
- Population health concepts, and the processes, approaches, and interventions that identify and address the major health-related needs and concerns of populations
- Biological, environmental, socio-economic, behavioral, cultural, and other factors that impact human health, influence the global and societal burden of disease, and contribute to health disparities
- Identification and pursuit of opportunities for promoting health and preventing disease across the life span and for enhancing public health preparedness
- Concepts of project implementation and management, including planning, budgeting, human resources, assessment, and evaluation
- Characteristics and organizational structures of the U.S. health care system and how they compare to health care systems in other countries
- Legal, ethical, economic, and regulatory dimensions of health care and public health policy, the roles, influences, and responsibilities of the different agencies and branches of government, and approaches to developing, evaluating, and advocating for public health policies
- Public health-specific communication and social marketing, including technical and professional writing and the use of mass media and electronic technology
- The cultural context of public health issues and respectful engagement with people of different cultures and socioeconomic strata
- Principles of effective functioning within and across organizations and as members of interdisciplinary and interprofessional teams
- Globalization and sustainable development and their relationship to population health.