



**RSPH**  
ROYAL SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH  
VISION, VOICE AND PRACTICE

# THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE WIDER PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE





## WHO ARE THE WIDER PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

It has never been more critical to have in place a public health workforce with the appropriate skills, knowledge, values, and competencies at every level to help build a healthier nation, reduce pressures on the NHS and support our economy. The public health workforce can be broadly categorised into three groups.

### WIDER

RSPH define this as:

All staff engaged in or who want to engage in public health activities, who identify public health as being an important part of their role but are not employed within the core public health workforce.

THIS IS AROUND 7.75M PEOPLE.

### CORE-PRACTITIONERS

All staff engaged in public health activities who identify public health as being the primary part of their role. Those who spend a major part, or all of their time, in public health practice delivering public health.

THIS IS AROUND 36,000 PEOPLE.<sup>1</sup>

### CORE-SPECIALIST

All staff engaged in public health activities who identify public health as being the primary part of their role and who are on the (GMC, UKPHR or GDC) specialist register.

THIS IS AROUND 1,300-1,500 PEOPLE.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74e93bed915d502d6cbfe6/CfWI\\_Mapping\\_the\\_core\\_public\\_health\\_workforce.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74e93bed915d502d6cbfe6/CfWI_Mapping_the_core_public_health_workforce.pdf)

By focussing on the value of those not traditionally thought of as part of public health – the wider public health workforce – we can use their skills to address some of the challenges we face. RSPH have been engaging with the wider public health workforce to gather evidence and insight on the public health they do, the challenges they face and what would support them to further develop their public health skills and knowledge.

The wider workforce is a highly diverse group made up of a range of professionals who carry out functions in health protection, health promotion and prevention. This includes pharmacists, the emergency services, allied health professionals, pest control workers, sports and fitness specialists and town planners amongst many occupations.

### **WHAT DO THEY DO AND WHERE IS SUPPORT NEEDED**

Many are already embedding public health approaches into their work. 6/10 told us they consider the impact on public health when making decisions at least twice a week. This shows the vast potential this workforce has in supporting communities, working with industry to support employees and tackling health inequalities. They identified that additional support, for example through training, would provide assurances and allow them to go further with this.

We also know that there is a lack of accessible entry points into public health for this workforce and a need for clear routes for career development. The importance of recognition of their work as impactful and contributing to public health, protection and prevention also came across strongly in our engagement.

The people who make up the wider public health workforce sit across many occupations and the majority will want to stay in those professions and specialisms. Anyone working within the wider public health workforce should be able to be recognised as a person with public health skills, to understand the routes they have to develop their skill, competency, and career and recognise the impact that they can have on public health and wellbeing.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 UK and devolved nation governments need to develop a cross-sector national strategy for the whole UK Public Health Workforce.

A national strategy is needed to effectively grow and support a comprehensive public health workforce that is fit for the future. There is already strong support across the public health community for this. This needs to take a four-nations, joined-up approach and build on strategic plans already in place or in development. A group which represents all facets of public health would be well placed to coordinate such a strategy. For example, the UK People In Public Health (UKPIPH) group could be supported with a small amount of funding to carry forward this work, working alongside all governments and relevant departments.

## 2 The sector and relevant government departments need to think collectively and smartly about how to resource, upskill and empower the Wider Public Health Workforce to maximise their impact.

Training is crucial and needs to be adequately resourced and funded in order to upskill and develop those who want to initiate or further their public health skills. This needs to specifically focus on training packages and qualifications that are transferrable and portable as people move through their career. We need think creatively and practically about how we access existing resources and education opportunities.



### **3 The Wider Public Health Workforce need to be better recognised as contributing to public health and prevention.**

Recognition of the wider public health workforce, within the public health sector and more widely, is a crucial first step to harnessing their skills and experience. As the leading organisation committed to supporting and growing the wider workforce, and with demonstrable impact to date, the RSPH are well placed to lead and support on this. RSPH have a range of ways for people to evidence their learning and competence to say that they are part of the wider workforce, these could easily be adapted to act as a benchmark.

### **4 The Wider Public Health Workforce needs clearer routes into public health and ways to develop and be recognised for their expertise in public health.**

As part of a training and development offer, RSPH need to work with the sector to develop competencies for those working across public health, which are inclusive, flexible, and adaptable for their sector. This should be clearly outlined in a national strategy. We know that many in the wider workforce want to develop their public health skills and competencies further and stay within their role. There will also be others who want to use training and career opportunities to move into the core public health workforce.

It is important that those working across public health appreciate the wider workforce, and also that the workforce genuinely feel like they are part of public health so both they and the public health system understand the impact they are having. We want people to develop and grow into public health roles whilst also using these pathways to lift people out of poverty and address longstanding inequalities.



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