

TITLE: COVID and Beyond: Building and Supporting Resilience in the Public Health Workforce

AUTHOR(S): Trey Doty, President and CEO, Responder Life, Teal Bohrer, Katelyn Gonzalez, Lindsey Manfrin, and Kirsten Aird

PRESENTER(S): Teal Bohrer, Responder Life, Moderator and Presenter; Katelyn Gonzalez, Responder Life, Presenter; Lindsey Manfrin, Yamhill County Public Health Administrator; Kirsten Aird, Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division Operations Director

STUDENT SUBMISSION: No

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Topic: Public Health Workforce Target: Public health leaders and staff

ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic response has taken its toll on the public health workforce as demonstrated in recent CDC and de Beaumont Foundation data. For example, a CDC study found that over 52 percent of public health workers who had worked in governmental public health at any time during 2020 indicated symptoms of at least one mental health condition, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder or suicidal ideation in the preceding two weeks. The public health system needs tools, strategies, supports and policies to ensure the workforce can continue to face ongoing and future public health challenges. This panel presentation will provide an overview of data on pandemic mental health impacts on the workforce and the resulting challenges in retaining staff. In addition, the panel will provide examples of supports and strategies public health organizations may use to support and increase workforce resiliency. An organization that provides support to public health leaders and staff, a local public health administrator, and a state public health leader will share their experiences and lessons learned as they supported the public health workforce during the height of the pandemic response and now as they look to the future.

OBJECTIVE(S): Name at least three data points that describe the mental health impacts of the pandemic on the public health workforce. Identify at least two signs of mental health impacts and/or trauma in individuals and at least two strategies for supportive response. Identify at least three strategies used to support the public health workforce during the pandemic. Describe two lessons learned during the pandemic to inform future strategies for supporting and building public health workforce resiliency.

PANEL MODERATOR: Teal Bohrer, Responder Life

PANEL ABSTRACT 1: In emergency response situations, first responders must respond to intense, life-threatening situations to protect others while also experiencing the trauma of the response themselves. In this panel presentation, Responder Life will highlight recent national public health data on the mental health and other workforce impacts of the pandemic on the public health workforce and discuss how those data correlate with the organization's experience supporting local public health workers during the pandemic. Responder Life will discuss how the organization adapted and applied strategies used with more traditional emergency first responders to support responders to a lengthy public health pandemic. In addition, Responder Life will share the signs of mental health impacts and/or trauma that public health leaders and staff should watch for among the workforce as well as some strategies for supportive engagement. Responder Life supports the well-being of first responders, often on the front lines of wildfires and law enforcement responses. In 2020, Responder Life began working in the

pandemic response to support staff and leaders through one-to-one, group and training settings. As the pandemic continued, Responder Life expanded their work to include supporting community-based organizations and local public health authorities.

PRESENTER 1: Katelyn Gonzalez

PANEL ABSTRACT 2: For more than two years, local public health authorities have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic response. The response required local public health leaders and staff to communicate and implement public health control practices and measures that affected their communities, including their own families, friends and neighbors. In addition, public health staff were tasked with not only investigating COVID-19 cases to stop the spread of the disease, but also called upon to provide to support to individuals who lacked basic resources. Some staff grieved the death of loved ones due to COVID-19 while still continuing to respond. A local public health administrator will describe how the pandemic affected the Yamhill County public health workforce, including staff turnover data. She will identify challenges the workforce faced and strategies and resources the organization used to support staff during the response phase of the pandemic. As local public health transitions into a new phase of the pandemic, she will reflect on the lessons learned during the pandemic response and how she is applying them to strengthen the local workforce moving forward, such as building and strengthening staff connection, recognition and shared decision making.

PRESENTER 2: Lindsey Manfrin

PANEL ABSTRACT 3: For more than two years, Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division (OHA-PHD) has been engaged in the COVID-19 pandemic response. State public health leaders and staff, along with their local colleagues, worked at an unprecedented pace, with limited and ever-evolving information, and, at times, implemented statewide mitigation measures that dramatically changed the lives of Oregonian, all to slow the spread of disease, save lives and preserve the capacity of the health care system. Early in the pandemic, OHA-PHD recognized the stress of the response on its staff and took steps to implement supports for its workers. Over time, the approaches evolved, and the organization continues to refine how it addresses the mental health and well-being needs of its diverse workforce. Offering a variety of resources and implementing workplace policies and practices that support health are examples of key strategies that will be described in the presentation. As Oregon continues to modernize its public health system with a focus on health equity in a post-pandemic-response world, OHA-PHD will share lessons learned in supporting the state public health workforce and how those learnings are shaping the organization's approach to workforce resiliency moving forward.

PRESENTER 3: Kirsten Aird
