



**ASTDN FACT SHEET:
What is Public Health Nursing?
What is the Impact of Public Health Nursing within Public Health?**

Public health nurses practice at the intersection of nursing and public health. The primary focus of public health nursing is to promote health and prevent disease for entire population groups, using knowledge from nursing, social, and public health sciences (American Public Health Association, Public Health Nursing Section 1996). Public health nursing practice, like public health, has a strong history of striving for social justice and health equity.

Public health nurses serve in critical roles within public health. Public health nurses work with communities, the individuals and families that compose the communities, and the systems that affect the communities. They work in schools, homes, clinics, jails, and out of mobile vans and even dog sleds. PHNs partner with policymakers, faith-based organizations, firefighters, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, free clinics, and numerous social service organizations.

- Public health nurses comprise the largest single professional component of the public health workforce. It has been estimated that nurses comprise between 30 and 60 per cent of the public health professionals working within public health. Clearly, the preponderance of nurses in public health speaks to the utility and effectiveness of nurses to achieving public health goals.
- Public health nurses know communities and know how to learn from communities. Public health nurses are uniquely placed within public health programs. Because they care for individuals and families, they come to know communities and populations and they translate what they experience in the care of individuals in a population to population- or community-wide use. Public health nurses engage communities to ensure that programs and policies are designed with input from and acceptable to the intended community.
- Public health nurses capitalize on their clinical knowledge and their unique relationships to those that they serve to design and implement programs and policies that truly meet the needs of vulnerable populations. Because of their strong clinical backgrounds, public health nurses provide important clinical guidance to population-based programs.
- Since the days of settlement houses, public health nurses have recognized the importance of environmental factors to health and insisted on better access to care for vulnerable populations. Public health nurses continue to campaign for health-promoting social policies. They may partner with supportive housing advocates to ensure adequate, accessible, and affordable housing or work with family day care providers to implement national standards for safe care. Or they might use epidemiology to identify neighborhoods with low immunization rates and partnering to develop culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions to increase those rates. Whatever the example, public health nurses have always been at the forefront of health promotion, health equity and social justice.
- Public health nursing often serves as an important entry point to leadership in public health. Many top state health officials possess a professional nursing background. Again, the combination of a clinical nursing background with knowledge from the public health and social sciences provide a sound basis for public health leadership.

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