

DSHS Office of Practice and Learning

Overview

The Office of Practice and Learning is a unique part of the Department of State Health Services. Our work is highly collaborative across the agency and Texas. We operate like a mini university inside a health department. We focus on public health workforce development, education and experiential learning, advancing research, and academic engagement initiatives. Much of our work centers around people—building and training the current and future workforce.

Key Programs and Projects

INTERNSHIPS

DSHS hosts about 100 interns per year—both at the undergraduate and graduate level. Interns are integrated into DSHS programs and engage in professional development opportunities such as meeting with executive staff, tours of the regional office, tours of the DSHS lab and pharmacy, networking meetings, and their project culminates with a final presentation where they showcase their work to an audience. In the past 2 years, about 25% of our interns are hired on into full time positions at DSHS. We have also seen about a 10% increase in the number of interns from 2022 to 2023.

Products and Services:

- Technical Assistance on internship project development and consultation on how to host interns at DSHS.
- Job Recruitment Fliers
- What can I do with a Major in XX Fliers
- Outreach to University faculty, staff, and students on internships, careers at DSHS, and the general work of DSHS

UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

Our office has expanded efforts of targeted recruitment to universities. We participated in 36 different outreach events at 25 unique universities in fall 2022 and spring 2023. We host career panels where students can learn straight from DSHS staff on what a job in public health looks like day to day. We have produced job and major recruitment flyers to connect what students are studying to a career in public health. For example, what kinds of jobs can you get in public health if you are a chemistry major or environmental health major. We have an opportunity to create a strategy around early career recruitment and brand awareness of DSHS.

TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH FELLOWSHIP

The Texas Public Health Fellowship is a one-year, full-time, paid training program designed for recent graduates or individuals early in their public health careers. Fellows come from a wide variety of backgrounds, levels of education, and have varied public

health interests. Fellows work side by side with public health professionals within DSHS or at Local Health Department and receive career coaching, a mentor, and professional development opportunities. The program runs from June 1st to May 31st.

We are currently in our second cohort of the Texas Public Health Fellowship Program. There has been great interest in this program—we saw a 54% increase in the number of applications from 2022 to 2023 and we were able to increase the number of Fellowship positions by 22% from 2022 to 2023. This has been an impactful program and mechanism to build a pipeline of public health professionals.

DSHS recognizes our role in training the future public health workforce. A key piece is providing the opportunity for early career public health professionals to gain relevant, hands-on experience. To the best of our knowledge, the Texas Public Health Fellowship Program is the first of its kind in Texas—in scale and in scope. We are hoping to secure funding for the 2024-2025 cohort to keep the momentum for the program.

Workforce Pipeline 2022-2023:

- 12 started full time positions at either DSHS or a local health department (~40%)
- 11 have either started medical school or graduate school (~37%)

Fellowship Numbers:

- 2022-2023: 35
- 2023-2024: 42

Preventive Medicine Residency Program

The DSHS Preventive Medicine Residency is a two-year accredited training program and has been at DSHS since the 1950s. Our residency is unique because it is housed in a state health department. Being within a State Health Department gives our residents a distinct advantage to learn while providing service to the state by working with experts in the various fields of public health. Physicians train at rotations within DSHS and across the State. For example, they work in Epidemiology and Disease Surveillance or travel to Alpine, TX to do a rural health experience. Residents also get a Master of Public Health degree (if they do not have one already).

Workforce Pipeline:

We focus on preparing physicians to work within and lead health departments at the local and state level. Many of our graduates have gone on to work full-time at DSHS in physician leadership roles. Three of our graduates currently work in physician leadership roles at DSHS--Dr. Ringsdorf and Dr. Prot are both Regional Medical Directors and Dr. Yamba is the DSHS TB Elimination Program Physician.

We currently have 3 residents. Dr. Alison Yarp, Dr. Shashank Naik, Dr. Brad Unroe

Public Health Workforce Training Center

The Public Health Workforce Training Center is a new in-house hub designed to provide staff with training resources so they can learn new skills and help advance their careers. Some of our first activities involved updating the Texas focused “Foundations of Public Health.” This training provides a general overview of public health as well as some specifics on how public health services work in Texas. It is a great onboarding tool for new public health employees or for those without formal public health training.

We are also working on building a library of role-specific training plans for DSHS positions. We started with epidemiologists and are currently working on public health nurse positions. These training plans are mapped to core public health (and/or position specific) competencies and are tailored to the specific needs for DSHS.

Continuing Education Service

We operate an in-house continuing education service. Our Continuing Education Service team awards over 80,000 continuing education credits to about 250 events each year (for example, conferences or online courses). We are accredited providers for about 10 different health professions—including physicians, nurses, health education specialists, marriage and family therapists, sanitarians, and more.

The Continuing Education Service also can provide free continuing education credits to events hosted by external partners. These are called “Joint Providerships.” A DSHS program would need to co-sponsor the event.

Grand Rounds

We produce the DSHS Grand Rounds, which are monthly presentations focused on a wide range of public health topics. This year some of our topics include sickle-cell disease, nursing workforce, and maternal and child health nutrition. Since 2008, we have hosted about 150 presentations. These are all free, can be accessed virtually, and we offer continuing education credits for attendance. They are typically held the last Wednesday of the month from 11-12:30pm.

Medical and Research Library

We operate a full-service medical and research library, which also includes an Audio-Visual Library. Our librarians connect the Texas Public Health Workforce to relevant and timely information. We can provide all services to HHSC and DSHS employees and we are able to provide most of our library services to local health department staff (or any partners external to HHS).

Services:



- Reference and Research Technical Assistance: MRL librarians offer expert skills and knowledge on how to access, sort, evaluate, filter, and disseminate information.
- Request books, e-books, DVDs, streaming video through the DSHS Library Catalog. Topics include public health, health policy and finance, mental health, technology, management and staff and professional development.
- Literature searches with free full-text copies
- Access to interlibrary loan services
- Automated searches for table of contents (You can also sign up to receive regular emails of any “pre-selected” journal articles table of contents so you can see the newest articles—say for example, JAMA or the American Journal of Preventive Medicine and then are able to reach out for any full text articles you are interested in reading).
- Monthly Medical and Research News Newsletter

Institutional Review Board

The agency’s Institutional Review Board sits in our office and is chaired by our Center’s Medical Director—Dr. Stephen Pont. Our Board consists of internal and external members, scientists, and non-scientists. We meet monthly to review data requests for research. We currently have over 300 active studies.

Grant Development Center

As part of our research advancement team, we formed a new Grand Development Center (this was formerly the Funding Information Center). Our goal is to increase and improve grant related resources, including grant writing support and technical assistance for DSHS programs, academic partners, and local health departments with limited capacity or expertise in grants. For example, pairing a doctoral class on NIH development course with a local health department with limited grant writing capacity.

Academic Public Health Partnerships and Consortium

This Consortium will consist of individual Academic Public Health Partnerships. An “Academic Public Health Partnership” is an organized, actionable, and mutually beneficial relationship between a public health department and an academic institution. These formal partnerships will create a network that will enhance capacity and resiliency, prepare, and train the workforce, and address public health challenges. With each school, we will formalize through a Memorandum of Understanding and create working committees to focus in three areas:

1. Public Health Practice: Any opportunity or experience where students apply the skills, concepts, strategies, and knowledge learned in the classroom in a public health setting.



2. Workforce Development: Training, educating, advancing, expanding, and enhancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of people who do or will do public health work.
3. Research: To generate evidence-based knowledge and insights that can inform public health policies, programs, and interventions.

Overall Benefits:

- Improve the relevance of education to public health practice (bridging the gap between academia and practice)
- Creating innovative, relevant public health practices and research
- Facilitate connections, communication, and trust between our two organizations
- Share and replicate evidence-based projects, initiatives, and interventions to the broader public health system
- Pooling resources, expertise, and funding can maximize reach and effectiveness to public health in Texas
- Provide opportunities and space to meet our organization's strategic goals and fulfill our missions
- Build up the future public health workforce and retain and train the current workforce

We are planning a Summer 2024 conference to highlight the work of our Academic Public Health Partnerships and Consortium. This event will offer trainings, sharing sessions, skill building workshops, highlight our achievements, and provide opportunities to collaborate.

