

Public health training in climate change: What are prospective employers thinking?

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Researchers at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health found that 92 percent of employers who responded to a survey on climate change and public health reported need for public health professionals with training in climate change will very likely increase in the next 5 to 10 years. While graduates of public health programs who focus on climate change are in demand in the current job market as well, these positions appear to be just a small proportion of the total number of jobs available in the field of public health. The findings are published online in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

"It is clear from our analysis that current employers value a host of skills and competencies such as knowledge of [climate](#) mitigation, health equity and climate justice, pollution-health consequences and causes, risk assessment, and policy analysis, among others," said Heather Krasna, MS, assistant dean and director, Career Services at Columbia Mailman School. "At the same time, we recognize that predicting future workforce needs with historical data or surveys does not give a complete picture of the disruptive reality created by [climate change](#). We cannot model the emerging future from prior trends only, but also must adopt new paradigms of education."

The researchers analyzed 16 years' worth of [public health](#) job postings for their projections of the skills needed for this future workforce using keyword searches, and survey responses from prospective employers of public health graduates focusing on climate change. In addition to

searching keywords or a combination of terms on Indeed.com and LinkedIn, the authors were provided access to 32,093 job postings on the free job board managed by the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH). The researchers found a statistically significant increase in the number of [jobs](#) in the ASPPH job board which mentioned climate change or [global warming](#) over the last 16 years.

A search of keywords "climate change" OR "global warming" on Indeed.com in mid-December 2019, found 2423 results, of which 159 also mentioned "public health." Thus, approximately 6.6 percent of the search results on the job board related to climate change had an overlap with public health (159 of 2423). An Indeed.com search for ("public health" OR "environmental health" OR epidemiology OR "health policy") in late December, found 37,490 public health-related jobs, of which approximately 0.4 percent also mentioned climate change or global warming. Using the National Cancer Institute's SOCCer (Standardized Occupation Coding for Computer-assisted Epidemiological Research) system the researchers analyzed organizations, job titles and descriptions.

To assess the views of current employers who are likely to need candidates with training in both public health and climate change, the researchers consulted with experts in both climate change and public health education, and included survey questions regarding specific competencies based on the current curriculum of Columbia University's Climate and Health Certificate program.

"For those institutions creating new training programs focusing on both climate change and public health, it will be important to assess whether their graduates will be in demand in the labor market, and if so, which sectors are most interested in hiring candidates with these skills," noted Krasna.

While the Mailman School research team describes the current state of the job market for public health graduates with climate change training as "emerging," there are relatively few roles currently available specifically for a graduate with a master's level public health degree and a focus in climate change. Notwithstanding, it is likely that graduates would benefit from training in climate change-related competencies, they noted, especially as we face the enormity of unpredictable global issues such as climate change.

"The scope and framing of our study focused primarily on the role of educational institutions in preparing graduates to solve the problems of today, and to meet the demands of today's employers," said Krasna. "However, we believe that universities provide much more than education, research, and service to their communities; they also take on an essential role moving our world toward sustainability."

More information: Heather Krasna et al, The Future of Careers at the Intersection of Climate Change and Public Health: What Can Job Postings and an Employer Survey Tell Us?, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17041310](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041310)

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