



Public health planning and environmental health

Environmental health workforce strategy

Environmental health is a key part of public health protection and preventative health. There is currently a critical shortage of Environmental Health Officers (EHO) in WA, with 56% of local governments experiencing recruitment difficulties of EHOs¹, more than any other occupation.

Integrating environmental health workforce strategies into public health planning is essential to ensure local governments are equipped to meet current and future public health challenges. A strong and sustainable environmental health workforce contributes directly to disease prevention, community wellbeing, and the protection of human health.

Key benefits of including environmental health workforce strategies in public health planning:

- Enhancing the visibility and identity of the profession to attract skilled and passionate individuals.
- Investing in professional development for environmental health practitioners and technicians to build capability and career pathways.
- Improving retention by supporting a well-resourced, valued, and future-ready workforce.

Environmental health professionals play a critical role in safeguarding public health through prevention, regulation, and response. As public health threats evolve, it is vital that environmental health practitioners are enabled, capable, supported, and prepared to respond effectively.

By addressing workforce challenges, we can position the environmental health profession for a future of greater recognition, stronger partnerships, and increased support and resources to protect the health of local government.

Example strategies that could be implemented are included in the table below:

Examples
Create positions for environmental health technicians to handle service requests for low public health risk to the community and other activities that do not require environmental health qualifications or authorisation. Recruit internal staff who may already understand how the local government operates, as well as undertaking external recruitment.
Provide opportunities for Environmental Health Officer Cadetship programs to recruit staff and graduates to the workplace, in partnership with training institutions.

¹ [2023 Local Government Workforce Shortage Survey in Western Australia](#)

Examples

Promote career videos through your local government communication channels (e.g. social media). Speak at local events (e.g. career expos or school forums) to educate individuals about career opportunities in public and environmental health.
Initiate communication with local high school and college career counsellors. Inform them about the workforce shortage and give them tools to share with students to promote a career in environmental health.
Develop short news articles, profiles or video clips of the Environmental Health team in action for distribution via newsletters, promotion reels for waiting areas, social media platforms, education networks, etc.
Ensure environmental health representation on internal groups such as the Local Emergency Management Committee or Development Control Panel to raise the profile and role of environmental health within the local government.
Implement flexible or part time working arrangements for Environmental Health Officers to enhance work-life balance, improve service delivery, and support workforce sustainability.
Develop mentoring networks for Environmental Health Officers, with a focus on supporting young and sole practitioners in rural and remote areas, by building on existing informal connections and establishing structured, sustainable mentoring frameworks
Ensure the Environmental Health workforce is clearly defined and prioritised within the local government's Workforce Plan.
Undertake regular surveys on job satisfaction and improvement opportunities for continuous improvement and staff retention within the Environmental Health team.
Fund the use of third-party mediation services to resolve low level complaints to ensure environmental health services focus on medium to high priority risks.

Supporting resources

- [Department of Health – Environmental Health Practitioners](#)
- [enHealth Environmental Health Officer Skills and Knowledge Matrix](#)
- [Environmental Health Australia Environmental Health Officer Cadetship Program Guidelines 2022](#)
- [Environmental Health Risk Assessment: Guidelines for assessing human health risks from environmental hazards](#)
- [Environmental health workforce development - Victoria](#)
- [Risky business – a resource to help local governments manage environmental health risk enHealth](#)

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