

Public Health AmeriCorps: Members' Service Experiences and Post-Service Career Plans

Background Information:

Public Health AmeriCorps (PHA) is a partnership between AmeriCorps and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that has enabled the recruitment, training, and development of a new generation of public health leaders who are ready to respond to the needs of the nation by serving their communities. Public Health AmeriCorps has two main goals:

1. Address public health needs of local communities by providing support in state and local public health settings and advancing equitable health outcomes for underserved communities.
2. Create pathways to public health-related careers through onsite experience and training, and recruiting AmeriCorps members who reflect the communities they serve.

Public Health AmeriCorps is especially unique in that it provides real world experience to individuals of all educational and professional backgrounds, allowing for people just beginning their career journey or those that are looking for a career pivot to contribute to the most urgent needs of their communities. In Summer 2024, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) at AmeriCorps sought to gain a better understanding of Public Health AmeriCorps members' experiences with their service and whether their service affected their post-service career plans. ORE had the opportunity to interview five program members to further explore these questions. These members were attending the 2024 National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) conference held in Detroit, Michigan and received a scholarship through NACCHO.

Below are some of the key takeaways from those voices from the field.

Key Takeaways:

Public Health AmeriCorps members are engaged in a wide variety of public health activities.

The field of public health is broad and diverse. Members work across this multi-sectoral spectrum and receive real-world experience to affect change in their communities. Two members reported they are working in harm reduction for individuals with substance use disorder; however, their individual roles are quite different: one member's role is to implement suicide prevention trainings in the community whereas the other member is certified as a community health worker who builds relationships with community members and helps them access the resources they need. Another member is an environmental investigator, monitoring air and water quality and responding to complaints; another is a public health project coordinator who researches public policy initiatives and creates trainings for the health department; and another member is working in a lifestyle medicine program teaching enrolled patients how to build and maintain healthy lifestyles.



"Public Health AmeriCorps totally opened a whole new world. Public health was an opportunity that I had never really considered before. It is such a broad field that you can still help people and make such a big difference."

- Aubree Denker, Institute of Rural Health at Idaho State University



"My degree of knowledge I have developed about environmental public health and being able to see its effects on citywide level was definitely a new field of knowledge for me."

- John McFall, Houston Health Department



"I was involved in a variety of projects: strategic planning, work force development, updating the grant contract project tracking system, updating the city's ethics guidelines for reaccreditation, and policy research for cannabis zoning."

- Nathan Carroll, City of Bloomington Public Health Department



"I became a community health worker and now am working with those who are homeless. I worked with an individual to get them into housing that was very untrusting but over time came to trust me more. I help to provide them with social security cards, help them get a high school diploma, and navigate their health care needs as well as other resources."

- Priscilla Miller, Mercer County Health Department

Public Health AmeriCorps members are getting certifications to complement their hands-on experience.

This national initiative has opened doors for Public Health AmeriCorps members: whether it is honing professional communication skills or obtaining credentials they can use in future careers, this program has allowed members to receive critical training to help them flourish in their personal and professional lives. All members reported that their ability to network and communicate effectively among different stakeholder groups and colleagues has improved over the course of their service term. One member reported earning her Community Health Worker and Mental Health First Aid certification. Another member stated that she was able to obtain certification to teach Question-Persuade-Refer for suicide prevention and Safe Talk training.



"I became certified as a Community Health Worker and also in Mental Health First Aid through the program and learned how to connect with people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds."

- Priscilla Miller, Mercer County Health Department

"I got to learn how to create connections with community partnerships and bi-directional partnerships, how to communicate as a professional, and learned how to use EPIC, the electronic medical records that hospital use."

- Mark Astfanous, New York City Health and Hospitals





"I gained institutional knowledge in areas of governmental public health, such as workforce development, project management, the ethical review process, and health policy. I also learned how to use software including Smartsheet and SharePoint."

- Nathan Carroll, City of Bloomington Health Department

"There have been lots of really good opportunities to further my education as well as individual projects that I can work on and be passionate about."

- Aubree Denker, Institute of Rural Health at Idaho State University



Public Health AmeriCorps is creating the space for people to get the experience they need to be future public health professionals.

Public Health AmeriCorps is unique in that it was specifically designed to tackle public health needs while simultaneously building a foundation on which to build public health careers. All of the interviewed members reported they were staying in the public health field following the end of their term of service. Four members reported they were either currently enrolled or about to enroll in a Master of Public Health (MPH) program. One member discussed how their Public Health AmeriCorps experience inspired them to go back to school to finish their Bachelor's degree. Four members will be taking jobs within the field while they complete their degrees: one member will work for their host site; another member is working at their host site while taking on a graduate teaching fellowship for their MPH program; another will begin working at the state health department; and the other will work at their host site while they wait for the next Public Health AmeriCorps term to start (this will be their fourth term as an AmeriCorps member).



"Public Health AmeriCorps reinforced my decision to go into epidemiology and gave me a better understanding of what the field is like. It provided me with versatile skills that will be easily transferrable to future jobs."

- Nathan Carroll, City of Bloomington Health Department

"I didn't have a clearly defined idea of what I was doing after graduating from undergrad public health degree so the fact that I was able to get a year's worth of work experience made a huge difference for my career prospects. I never would have been able to get a job with the city."

- John McFall, Houston Health Department




"Through my service I was able to get involved with the masses in public health at Idaho State. I applied for a graduate teaching assistantship and now my MPH is being paid for while I am also working with the state health department. This experience has opened up doors for me and made me realize that public health is a good fit for me and is a path I want to go down."

- Aubree Denker, Institute of Rural Health at Idaho State University

Summary:

The conversations with Public Health AmeriCorps members provided insight into what roles and responsibilities members assume during their service term, what skills and training opportunities are available to members, the types of certifications/credentials they have been receiving through their trainings and how their term of service is impacting their future career plans. These interviews suggest that Public Health AmeriCorps is providing a robust hands-on experience that is leading to further education and/or jobs in the public health field following their term of service.

These “voices from the field” offer situational awareness of the experiences of Public Health AmeriCorps members. It also serves as a supplement to other current evidence-building efforts of ORE at AmeriCorps in this space, including:

 Recovery Coaching Research	 Return on Investment Studies
<p>AmeriCorps funds research that seeks to fill critical knowledge gaps on recovery coaching as a promising treatment strategy across AmeriCorps-supported organizations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life Cycle Evaluation: Recovery Coaching Bundle • A Promising Response to the Opioid Crisis: CNCS-Supported Recovery Coach Programs 	<p>AmeriCorps commissioned the following ROI studies to measure program performance and build an evidence base for future resource allocation decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AmeriCorps Senior: Foster Grandparents/Senior Companion • AmeriCorps Urban Safety Program Detroit • Birth & Beyond Home Visitation Program
 AmeriCorps State and National Grantee Impact Evaluations	 AmeriCorps Public Health Impact Studies
<p>An AmeriCorps evidence brief that highlights the impact of AmeriCorps-funded Healthy Futures programs and interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check out the Effective CNCS-Funded Healthy Futures Programs brief 	<p>A webinar highlights AmeriCorps’ potential to help with community health programs addressing the opioid crisis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View the How AmeriCorps Investments are Addressing the Opioid Crisis webinar
 AmeriCorps ORE Research Grantees	
<p>AmeriCorps’ ORE provides research grants to researchers, scholars, and dissertators at higher education institutions to advance the field’s understanding of civic engagement, volunteering, and national service, and civil society more broadly. A few of the ORE Research Grantees that have specifically studied the intersection of civic engagement and public health include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appalachian State University • Case Western Reserve University • University of Texas at Austin • Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Tech 	

AmeriCorps ORE is grateful to the Public Health AmeriCorps members who offered their time and knowledge to help us better understand their work and experiences and hope that we can take these lessons to continue supporting AmeriCorps' strategic goals related to public health and civic engagement.



Mark Astfanous was a Public Health AmeriCorps member serving with NYC Service, working as a Community Outreach Liaison with the Lifestyle Medicine team at NYC Health + Hospitals. With a biology and public health background, he joined Public Health AmeriCorps to gain hands-on experience and make an impact on community health. Mark helped create communication pathways with community-based organizations and enhance awareness and participation in health programs. Since his service, he has completed his Master's degree in Public Health and aims to continue his career within the public health sector.



Nathan Carroll served with Public Health AmeriCorps at the City of Bloomington, Minnesota from 2023-2024. Having interned with the city while obtaining his Master's degree in Public Health, Public Health AmeriCorps provided an excellent opportunity to learn more about the field of public health and gain experience in a variety of project areas. He now works at the Minnesota Department of Health with immunization records team as a research scientist.



Aubree Denker is a dedicated Public Health AmeriCorps member who served at the Institute of Rural Health in Pocatello, Idaho. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences and has been accepted into the Master's in Public Health program at Idaho State University with a full Graduate Teaching Assistant scholarship. Aubree is passionate about public health because of its multidimensional nature and the vast opportunities it provides to give back to the community. Throughout her AmeriCorps service, she has contributed to a range of projects, including a mental health outreach and education initiative that offered free suicide prevention and intervention skills training across Idaho.



John McFall served as an AmeriCorps Member at the Houston Health Department while finishing a Bachelor's degree in Public Health at the University of Houston. He now works as a full-time employee of the Houston Health Department in the Environmental Health Section and is currently applying Public Health Master's programs. John believes the best way to do the most good in this world is through public health and hopes to be a part of environmental policy changes that can bridge environmentalism and healthcare.



Priscilla Miller, a three-term AmeriCorps service member, brings her passion for community health to the Mercer County Health Department in Kentucky. There, she tackles harm reduction through the needle exchange program. She also collaborates with family resource officers, ensuring families access essential services. Priscilla's dedication stems from a lifelong desire to serve her community. Her future holds a promise of continued service, aiming to make a positive impact wherever she's needed.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](#).**