

Public Health Law Competency Model for Attorneys

Public Health Competency Model for Attorneys Version 1.0

This competency model was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) Public Health Law Program (PHLP) to address skills and knowledge that lawyers working within the public health sector may achieve during their careers. It presents a user-friendly model of relevant concepts and abilities in public health for public health attorneys to operate effectively in their roles.

Competencies, meaning capabilities or abilities, are used to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to identify accomplishments and set goals for professional development.^{1,2} A competency model is a set of competencies, often categorized into domains or groups, that workers and employers can use to describe levels of skills or knowledge individuals may be expected to reach for satisfactory to exceptional performance.³ These can also be referred to as “core competencies.”

The primary goal of the Public Health Competency Model for Attorneys (PHCMA) is to specify the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities in public health that are essential to attorneys working in state, tribal, local, and territorial public health agencies (Table 1).

Background and Purpose

Lawyers often do not have formal education in the basic public health principles that are critical to being effective partners in the field of public health.⁴ Public health is a broad field, and as such, the PHCMA is meant to inform rather than prescribe key public health principles for public health attorneys. Other public health-related KSAs may be necessary, depending on the role attorneys fulfill in agencies and areas in which they specialize. However, the PHCMA provides a user-friendly set of competencies to establish a basis of understanding for public health attorneys.

The PHCMA has several key intended uses for career planning, assessment, and continuing education. The model may be used for career exploration and to inform career decisions among students interested in entering the field. The competencies may be used in job descriptions to identify proficiencies among job candidates and to self-assess KSAs in public health. Agencies and attorneys may use the PHCMA as a guide to identify relevant trainings, resources, and tools across tiers of professional practice. The competency statements may also be used to develop and evaluate curricula in competency-based training and in learning outcome objectives.

Similar to other public health competency models, the PHCMA was developed using modified Delphi methodology.^{5,6} The Delphi method involves a three-phase process in which 1) PHLP formed an Expert Review Workgroup (ERW) and provided them with a competency library to review and assess for applicability to public health attorneys in several rounds, 2) competency model review in which the draft competency model was reviewed in two subsequent stages of revision, and 3) external model validation and finalization to verify the accuracy and relevance of the content, as well as identify gaps in its framework.

¹ Boyatzis, Richard E. “Competencies in the 21st Century.” *Journal of Management Development* (2008).

² Ransom, Montrece McNeill, Yassine, Brianne. “Exploring the Development of Three Law-Based Competency Models for Practitioners.” *Journal of Social, Behavioral and Health Sciences* 13.1 (2019): 128.

³ [Competency Models—Communicating Industry’s Education and Training Needs: Competency Model Development and Use: A Technical Assistance Guide](#), Competency Model Clearing House (2015).

⁴ Parmet, Wendy E, Robbins, Anthony. “Public Health Literacy for Lawyers.” *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 31.4 (2003): 701-713.

⁵ Calhoun, Judith G., et al. “Development of a core competency model for the master of public health degree.” *American Journal of Public Health* 98.9 (2008): 1598-1607.

⁶ Ablah, Elizabeth, et al. “Public health preparedness and response competency model methodology.” *American Journal of Disaster Medicine* 14.4 (2019): 247-254.



Key Assumptions About the PHCMA

The PHCMA encompasses the public health characteristics that support the successful practice of public health law. As such, PHLP and the ERW understood that certain assumptions must be made about competency development in a transdisciplinary emerging field—

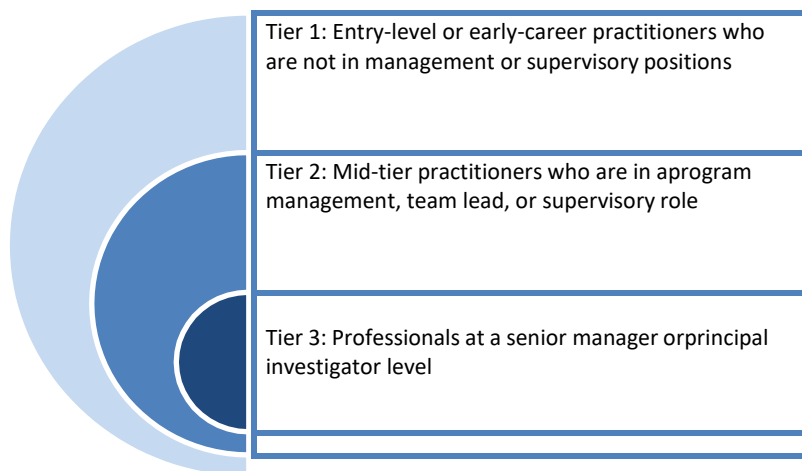
- A foundational understanding of public health principles and concepts can benefit public health attorneys in their roles.
- Increased understanding of public health KSAs may provide a greater contextual understanding to lawyers as they apply legal expertise to public health issues.
- These competencies are meant to reflect basic competencies at three tiers of practice within each domain, but not all of the necessary skills for every job would be represented in the model and every person working in the field would not necessarily need all of the competencies listed. As such, the model was created to provide a broadset of skills and should be tailored for individual job descriptions and uses.

Organization of the PHCMA

The PHCMA is organized into four major domains: 1) General Public Health Skills, 2) Public Health Sciences and Assessment, 3) Communication and Transdisciplinary Collaboration, and 4) Leadership and Systems Thinking. Domain 1 focuses on understanding the basic principles of public health and its role in improving the health of populations. Domain 2 addresses how public health and legal tools together address the needs of populations and how to interpret and apply the public health data in decision-making. Domain 3 explores collaboration within the transdisciplinary sphere of public health and effective communication with other sectors with which public health collaborates. Domain 4 focuses on leadership within public health, as well as considering influencing factors for the field of public health that may affect agency priorities and legal work.

The model delineates competencies across three tiers of career development in public health practice (Fig. 1). The tiers build on each other and describe knowledge and skills necessary at progressive stages of public health attorney career development: 1) entry-level or early-career, 2) mid-tier practitioners, and 3) professionals at senior management levels. Key behaviors used while performing law-related job duties reflect each competency statement across each tier.

Figure 1: Three Stages of Public Health Attorney Career Development



Acknowledgments and Disclaimers

This document was developed by Brienne Yassine, PhD, MPH, DRT Strategies, serving the Public Health Law Program (PHLP), the National Center for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Infrastructure and Workforce (NCSTLPHIW), CDC; and Sofia Gracias, MPH, intern, PHLP, NCSTLPHIW, CDC, and Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University. PHLP thanks Montrece McNeill Ransom, JD, MPH, School of Health Sciences, Walden University.

For further assistance with the PHCMA, please contact PHLP at phlawprogram@cdc.gov. PHLP provides technical assistance and public health law resources to advance the use of law as a public health tool. PHLP cannot provide legal advice on any issue and cannot represent any individual or entity in any matter. PHLP recommends seeking the advice of an attorney or other qualified professional with questions regarding the application of law to a specific circumstance. The findings and conclusions in this summary are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC.

Table 1: Public Health Competency Model for Attorneys

Domain 1: General Public Health Skills

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Understands the transdisciplinary roles and responsibilities within the public health system.	Articulates the roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies within the public health system.	Explains the roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies within the public health system.	Contributes to the development and advancement of roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies within the public health system.
	Explains the role of public health in providing equitable access to services and improving population health.	Contributes to the advancement of the role of public health in providing equitable access to services and improving population health.	Strategizes for the development and advancement of the role of public health in providing equitable access to services and improving population health.
Articulates the significance of diversity and inclusion, intersectionality, and equity to public health.	Recognizes and values the intersecting contexts of cultural diversity, including gender, race, religion, poverty, history, and migration, as critical to the design of interventions within public health systems.	Encourages the intersecting contexts of cultural diversity, including gender, race, religion, poverty, history, and migration, as critical to the design of interventions within public health systems.	Includes considerations for and supports the intersecting contexts of cultural diversity, including gender, race, religion, poverty, history, and migration in the design of interventions within public health systems.
	Recognizes the importance of equitable and diverse representation in contributing to public health research and practice.	Advocates for equitable and diverse representation in contributing to research and practice that affect public health.	Strategizes and advocates for equitable and diverse representation in contributing to research and practice that affect public health.

Applies principles of ethics to work in public health.	Acts with honesty and integrity in relationships with clients, team members, stakeholders, and other community members.	Acts with and encourages others to act with honesty and integrity in relationships with clients, team members, stakeholders, and other community members.	Promotes organization or agency adherence to and compliance with ethical standards of practice (e.g., Public Health Code of Ethics) in all client, team, stakeholder, and community interactions.
---	---	---	---

Domain 2: Public Health Science

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Assesses factors that contribute to the health status of a population.	Recognizes the levels of social, behavioral, community, and built environment factors that impact public health (e.g., health equity, housing, education, income, environment).	Describes levels of social, behavioral, community, and built environment factors that impact public health (e.g., health equity, housing, education, income, environment).	Assesses and analyzes levels of social, behavioral, community, and built environment factors that impact public health (e.g., health equity, housing, education, income, environment).
	Understands the need for community health assessments and the role of the attorney inequitably improving policy to protect and promote public health for all.	Engages in community health assessments and strategizes to equitably improve public health policy reflective of community values and identified needs.	Engages in community health assessments and uses legal tools to advocate for improvement of equitable public health policy reflective of community values and identified needs.
Analyzes public health evaluations and interventions and anticipates possible outcomes.	Recognizes resources and supports transdisciplinary stakeholders that can contribute to public health intervention planning and evaluation (e.g., expertise from community sources and lived experiences).	Identifies resources and routinely engages with and transdisciplinary stakeholders that can contribute to public health intervention planning and evaluation (e.g., expertise from community sources and lived experiences).	Identifies resources and jointly strategies with transdisciplinary stakeholders that can contribute to public health intervention planning and evaluation (e.g., expertise from community sources and lived experiences).
	Identifies short-term and long-term, intended and unintended implications of decisions on organization or agency priorities.	Identifies and plans for short-term and long-term, intended and unintended implications of decisions on organization or agency priorities.	Anticipates and adapts short-term and long-term planning to reflect organization or agency priorities and to plan for intended and unintended implications.

Articulates basic principles of public health and public health law research to help understand factors that contribute to the health status of a population.	Understands legal and ethical principles of public health data collection, use, and dissemination.	Explains legal and ethical principles of public health data collection, use, and dissemination.	Promotes and monitors agency or organization adherence to legal and ethical principles of public health data collection, use, and dissemination.
	Describes data and information sources for public health research and practice, including population health status and determinants of health.	Identifies data trends and information sources for public health research and practice, including population health status and determinants of health.	Analyzes and applies data trends and information sources for public health research and practice, including population health status and determinants of health.
	Identifies the basic principles and terminology of biostatistics, epidemiology, and legal epidemiology as used to inform public health issues.	Understands the basic principles and terminology of biostatistics, epidemiology, and legal epidemiology as used to inform public health issues.	Interprets and applies principles of biostatistics, epidemiology, and legal epidemiology to inform public health issues.
Identifies the need for an evidence-base to inform health, fiscal, administrative, legal, social, and political activities.	Articulates the importance of evidence-based decision making in public health (e.g., translating community health needs in terms of the impact of policy interventions).	Applies evidence-based decision-making in public health (e.g., translating community health needs in terms of the impact of policy interventions).	Engages in and promotes evidence-based decision making in public health (e.g., translating community health needs in terms of the impact of policy interventions).
	Collaborates with transdisciplinary experts to identify public health science principles (e.g., microbiology or legal epidemiological data) for use in public health laws, policies, and regulations.	Collaborates with transdisciplinary experts to incorporate public health science principles (e.g., microbiology or legal epidemiological data) into public health laws, policies, and regulations.	Strategizes and collaborates with transdisciplinary experts to incorporate public health science principles (e.g., microbiology or legal epidemiological data) into public health laws, policies, and regulations.

Domain 3: Communication and Transdisciplinary Collaboration

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Communicates the role of law and public health attorneys as contributing to the public health	Understands the role of public health law and policy in improving public health.	Promotes the use of public health law and policy in improving public health.	Advocates for the use of public health law and policy to improve public health.

system.	Communicates the roles and responsibilities of public health attorneys to support the priorities and public health efforts of diverse audiences and clients.	Promotes the roles and responsibilities of public health attorneys to support the priorities and public health efforts of diverse audiences and clients.	Advocates for and advances the roles and responsibilities of public health attorneys to support the priorities and public health efforts of diverse audiences and clients.
Engages in bidirectional, culturally humble communication with diverse and transdisciplinary audiences.	Practices cultural humility and situational awareness to address sensitive issues with diverse audiences.	Practices cultural humility and situational awareness to anticipate and address sensitive issues with diverse audiences.	Fosters and encourages cultural humility and situational awareness among teams to anticipate and address sensitive issues with diverse audiences.
	Engages in active listening and open dialogue to learn from diverse, transdisciplinary clients and stakeholders advance public health goals.	Encourages and promotes active listening and open dialogue to learn from and share information with diverse, transdisciplinary clients and stakeholders advance shared public health goals.	Promotes and facilitates active listening and open dialogue to learn from and share information with diverse, transdisciplinary clients and stakeholders advance shared public health goals.
Translates legal information to stakeholders to inform health, fiscal, administrative, legal, social, and political activities.	Communicates legal language in a clear manner to effectively engage with transdisciplinary clients, stakeholders, and other audiences (e.g., to clarify legal and policy information, resolve issues, convey legal research options, and negotiate services and agreements).	Translates legal language to effectively engage with transdisciplinary clients, stakeholders, and other audiences (e.g., to clarify legal and policy information, resolve issues, convey legal research options, and negotiate services and agreements).	Promotes and advances legal literacy among agency or organization staff to effectively engage with transdisciplinary clients, stakeholders, and other audiences (e.g., to clarify legal and policy information, resolve issues, convey legal research options, and negotiate services and agreements).

Domain 4: Leadership and Systems Thinking

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Applies principles of ethics in addressing client and stakeholder needs.	Acts with integrity, honesty, and transparency, as well as adherence to social justice and human rights principles in consulting on client and stakeholder needs.	Demonstrates and supports integrity, honesty, and transparency, as well as adherence to social justice and human rights principles in addressing client and stakeholder policy, program, and service needs.	Promotes and incorporates principles of integrity, honesty, transparency, social justice, and human rights principles in addressing client and stakeholder policy, program, and service needs.
Applies team building and conflict management skills.	Demonstrates team building, negotiation, and conflict management skills.	Builds teams, negotiates fairly and effectively, and manages conflicts.	Builds and empowers teams, negotiates fairly and effectively, and resolves conflicts.
Collaborates to address public health priorities and achieve goals.	Collaborates with diverse clients and stakeholders to achieve shared community and agency or organization goals.	Develops and maintains professional relationships with diverse clients and stakeholders to achieve shared community and organization or agency goals.	Develops and maintains professional relationships with diverse clients and stakeholders to establish shared community and organization or agency goals.
	Identifies government agencies with legal authority to address public health priorities and community health outcomes (e.g., emergency preparedness, toxins in water or housing, built environment factors).	Collaborates with government agencies with legal authority to address public health priorities and community health outcomes (e.g., emergency preparedness, toxins in water or housing, built environment factors).	Develops and maintains collaborations with government agencies with legal authority to address public health priorities and community health outcomes (e.g., emergency preparedness, toxins in water or housing, or built environment factors).
Analyzes changes in the community context as informing organization or agency activities.	Understands the direct and indirect impacts of social, political, economic, environmental, and scientific changes on the community and organizational or agency priorities.	Adapts in response to direct and indirect political, economic, environmental, and scientific changes that impact the community and organizational or agency priorities.	Anticipates and adapts organization or agency priorities to in response to direct and indirect social, political, economic, environmental, and scientific changes that impact the community.

Appendix A: Expert Review Workgroup Members and PHLP PHCMA Project Staff, January–December 2020

1. Courtni Alexis Andrews, MPH, CHES
ORISE Fellow
Partnerships & Initiatives Unit, Office of Minority Health and Health Equity, CDC
2. Donald Benken, JD, MPH
Deputy Director
PHLP, NCSTLTPHIW, CDC
3. Cheryl Bullard
Special Counsel
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
4. Anders Cedergren, PhD, MEd
Assistant Professor
Health Education & Health Promotion
University of Wisconsin La Crosse
5. Jenna Cizcewski, MPH
Public Health Analyst
PHLP, NCSTLTPHIW, CDC
6. Cicily Hampton, PhD, MPA
Chief Policy & Programs Officer
Society for Public Health Education
7. Tyriesa Howell, PhD
Assistant Professor
Brown School, Washington University in Saint Louis
8. Taylor Ingram, MPH
Senior Director,
Health Services Department of Public Health and Wellness
Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government
9. Christopher Jones, PhD, MSW
Lead Health Scientist
Office of the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy, CDC
10. Jennifer Kaminski, PhD
Team Lead, Child Development Studies
National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, CDC
11. Greg Lewis, MRP
The Franklin Regional Council of Governments
12. Sarah Mardovich, MPH
Senior Training & Workforce Development Coordinator
PHLP, CDC
13. Amanda Moreland, JD, MPH
Staff Attorney
PHLP, CDC
14. Hayley Penan, JD, MPH
Deputy Legislative Counsel
State of California Office of Legislative Counsel

15. Matthew Penn, JD, MLIS
Director
PHLP, NCSTLPHIW, CDC
16. Dori Russ, MD, JD
Physician/Attorney
The Russ Group, LLC
17. Emely Sanchez, JD(c), MPH
University of Miami Law School