

## POSITION STATEMENT

### **Investing in the Public Health Workforce: The importance of public health education, training and research December 2025**

The Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) is the peak advocacy body that represents universities and aligned organisations that educate, research and develop the Australasian public health workforce. CAPHIA advances excellence in academic standards in the education and development of public health practitioners, researchers and students across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.

#### **What is Public Health?**

Public health is an essential discipline that underpins the health, wellbeing, and resilience of communities. Universities are the primary education and research bodies for the public health workforce in Australasia. A skilled public health workforce is critical for Australia and the region to address current and future public health challenges. Government strategies and global recognition highlight the urgent need for investment in public health capacity.

#### **Why does investment in the public health workforce matter?**

Without sustained investment, Australia and the region face critical risks to their ability to respond to health threats and safeguard communities. Key risks include:

- *Workforce shortages:* Disinvestment in education reduces the future workforce of trained public health professionals.
- *Reduced research capacity:* Loss of academic positions undermines evidence generation to inform policy and practice.
- *Weakening resilience:* Fewer experts to address the complex, interconnected drivers of health.
- *Reputational damage:* Universities risk losing international credibility and the ability to secure major grants and partnerships.
- *Misalignment with government priorities:* Disinvestment directly undermines Australia's and the region's commitments to disease prevention commitments to disease prevention and health promotion.

#### **What is CAPHIA asking for?**

CAPHIA calls for urgent coordinated action to safeguard and expand public health education, research and workforce development across Australasia.

- University leadership must safeguard and invest in public health education by protecting programs, retaining and supporting Schools of Public Health, resourcing academic expertise, recognising public health as a distinct and vital discipline essential to population wellbeing; and ensure all elements are sustainably resourced.
- Governments must recognise public health education and research as critical, provide secure and ongoing funding and prioritise long-term workforce development.
- Communities must value and advocate for a skilled public health workforce as essential to health, equity and resilience.

## The role of public health

Public health is the foundational framework that enables equity, safety, and wellbeing, which is often unseen, but always essential - enabling communities and countries to thrive. It translates research into effective action and evaluates impact across diverse settings to improve health outcomes. Public health is delivered across government agencies, educational and research institutions, health systems, and community organisations.

The public health workforce are experts in evidence appraisal, communication, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, working with priority populations to deliver effective interventions <sup>1</sup>.

Public health professionals operate at local, national and global levels to prevent disease, promote wellbeing, mobilise action, and manage risk – managing outbreaks, enabling healthy behaviours, creating healthy public policy, and addressing the systemic drivers of unequal health outcomes.

## The role of Universities

Universities are the foundation of public health workforce development. They educate graduates in the science and practice of protecting and improving population health. Universities conduct vital research that generates evidence to inform practice and policy, and they act as civic institutions with responsibility to strengthen community health and resilience <sup>2</sup>.

Each public health course is shaped by the unique needs, networks, and expertise of its local community, reflecting the breadth and depth of the discipline. Preserving this diversity across universities is essential to ensure a workforce that is adaptable, equitable and responsive to the varied public health challenges across Australasia.

## Global challenges and national priorities across Australasia

The importance of public health has never been greater. Rapid environmental change, shifting demographics, and growing inequities are intensifying the pressures on communities and health systems. Climate change <sup>3</sup>, ageing populations <sup>4</sup>, the burden of chronic disease, and the social and economic impacts of misinformation and global mobility all contribute to complex health challenges that require coordinated, long-term solutions.

These interlinked challenges spanning from the health impacts of heat stress, food insecurity, and air pollution to the social determinants of mental wellbeing demand a workforce skilled in prevention, systems thinking, and community engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a reminder of the importance of preparedness and resilience, but the next era of public health extends far beyond infection control. It involves addressing the root causes of poor health and creating conditions that enable all people to thrive.

International consensus recognises the urgent need to strengthen and invest in public health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for an expansion of public health education to meet future demands including through its [Roadmap](#) and [Action Plan](#) for Essential Public Health Functions <sup>5 6</sup>. The Rome Declaration of the G20 Global Health Summit and [2024 G20 Summit](#) both emphasised the need for increased investment in public health and initiatives to reduce health inequities <sup>7 8</sup>.

## Disinvestment and its impact

Disinvestment in public health education has serious and far-reaching consequences. It weakens workforce development, undermines research capacity, and diminishes societies' ability to prevent disease, promote wellbeing, translate policy into practice, and respond to emerging health threats. Examples of disinvestment include:

- *Closure of Schools and Departments of Public Health* resulting in the loss of expertise, leadership, research, and negative workforce impacts
- *Discontinuation or reduction of public health courses* limiting student pathways and creating future workforce shortages.
- *Merging of public health into broader schools, departments, or faculties* siloing public health and reducing influence and visibility
- *Failure to recognise public health as a distinct discipline*, weakening its status and resourcing within higher education
- *Delivery of public health teaching by those without appropriate disciplinary expertise*, compromising educational quality and professional integrity

These disinvestments dilute expertise, erode visibility, and diminish the credibility of the profession<sup>9</sup>. When fewer students are trained and academic positions are lost, the pipeline of skilled professionals shrinks, leaving critical gaps in prevention, surveillance, health promotion, healthy public policy and emergency response.

Without a strong public health workforce, governments will struggle to implement their priorities. Communities will be less protected from threats ranging from infectious disease outbreaks to the escalating impacts of chronic disease and climate change. In times of crisis, the regions' capacity for a coordinated, evidence-informed response will be compromised.

The rationale for sustained investment in public health is clear: prevention saves lives and is more cost-effective than reactive healthcare. Public health expertise safeguards health, security, and prosperity at scale. Disinvestment not only weakens universities and research but undermines the very systems that protect communities.

Investment in the public health workforce is not optional—it is a strategic imperative for national health, security, and prosperity

## Related CAPHIA Position Statements

- [CAPHIA Position Statement: Educating the Public Health Workforce](#)
- [CAPHIA Position Statement: The role of Public Health in meeting local and global challenges](#)

## References

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6. World Health Organisation. National workforce capacity for essential public health functions: Operational handbook for country-led contextualization and implementation. 2024.  
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8. G7G20. Declaration of the G20 Health Ministers, 2024.
9. Galea S. The Potential Consequences of Disinvestment in Health in the US. . *JAMA Health Forum* 2025; 6(4): e250803.