

Comments to the Statewide Health Care Review Committee
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Chair Lontine and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Statewide Health Care Review Committee at this critical moment of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colorado. As I speak with you today, Colorado is experiencing another serious surge in COVID-19 cases, one that could rise as high as last year's peak in December when over 1800 Coloradans were hospitalized with COVID-19. Yesterday, that figure was 1254. The COVID-19 pandemic has stress-tested Colorado's health care workforce, leading to burn-out and fear about personal health risks and extraordinary pressures on public health professionals solely because they are doing their jobs.

Overview of the Colorado School of Public Health

As Dean of the Colorado School of Public Health, my focus today will be the public health workforce generally and more specifically on the school's contributions to staffing public health agencies at the state and local levels and our response to the pandemic related to the workforce. But first, I describe the contributions of the five schools at the Anschutz Medical Campus to training health care workers for the state. At the Anschutz Campus, the student fall total enrollment currently stands at about 4,500: School of Public Health—709; School of Medicine—1686; School of Nursing—1050; School of Pharmacy—556; and School of Dental Medicine—353. Together, these schools and training programs are the key contributors to the healthcare workforce in Colorado.

Turning to our contributions to the public health workforce, the Colorado School of Public Health was founded in 2008, responding to the need to strengthen public health in the state as called for in the Public Health Act of 2008. Now in its 14th year, the school is unique for being collaborative with three independent but connected programs sited at the Anschutz Medical Campus, Colorado State University, and the University of Northern Colorado. We offer the Master of Public Health or MPH degree with many options for concentration, the Doctorate in Public Health or DrPH degree, and various Master of Science degrees. We also collaborate with the UC Denver campus in an undergraduate program in public health including about 500 students and we are involved in increasing numbers of 4+1 programs, which provide both an undergraduate degree and an MPH after five years of education. Considering the entering class this fall, 58.5% were state residents.

Since its founding in 2008, graduates from the Colorado School of Public Health total over 2,000. They pursue a wide variety of career paths, reflective of the opportunities for those with

public health training, with many working in state and local health departments. The table below provides a picture of the career paths of our alumni for the five years from 2016 through 2020. While many pursue further education, 16.6 % list employment in a state or local health department specifically and another 15.2 % are in a healthcare setting. As a further indicator of the school's impact, at the recent meeting of the Colorado Public Health Association, 48% of the presentations included a graduate of the school.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Grand Total
Elementary Education	2	3	4	3	4	16
Post Secondary Education	33	26	49	46	33	187
U.S. Federal Government, HHS	2	2	2	4	7	17
U.S. Federal Government	2	1	8	3	1	15
State Health Department	14	15	22	18	16	85
State Government	2	4	6	1	3	16
Local Health Department	4	13	19	12	10	58
Local Government	4	6	3	3	4	20
Military	1	2	2	4	3	12
Non-U.S. Government				1	1	2
Hospital		30	13	22	28	93
Managed Care Organization		3	1	5	3	12
Other Health Care Provider			14		12	26
Consulting Firm	2	3	3	5	7	20
Marketing or Communications Firm		1				1
Health IT Company	3	1		6	4	14
Health Insurance Company	1	1	5	4	1	12
Pharmaceutical Company	1	4	3	2	6	16
Other For-Profit Firm		8	9	10	9	36
Trade Association			4	1	1	6
Foundation or NGO		31	4	4	8	47
Other Non-Profit Organization			17	3	22	42
Unknown		4	4	11	17	36
Other	64	7	2		2	75
Grand Total	135	165	194	168	202	864

Responding to the Pandemic

Even before the pandemic, the public health workforce was inadequate nationally and in Colorado. Across the United States, the governmental public health workforce shrank by over 15% between 2008 and 2019 and in Colorado staffing ratios (staff to population) at local public health agencies fell by more than 25%. Training gaps were well known, as in Colorado. These pre-existing problems were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken its toll

through the stress of contending with the ongoing pandemic and the challenges to public health agencies and particularly their leaders as they have implemented sound public health measures.

From the Colorado School of Public Health has used its resources to support the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and local public health agencies. Notably, the school assembled a team across CU and CSU to carry out epidemic modeling, collaborating with CDPHE and the Governor's Office; its students were hired to work as contact tracers for the state and several local public health agencies; it provided training on a variety of issues; and it engaged with communities to address low vaccination rates. As an example, in its partnership with CDPHE, the school hired 129 students as contact tracers, 9 for surveillance of respiratory diseases, and 24 for enteric infections.

Looking longer-term, interest in public health as a career has mounted in parallel with the pandemic. Newly matriculated students at the school numbered 235 in 2019; that figure increased to 316 in 2020 and 326 in 2021. We are uncertain about further growth, but the school has readily accommodated this surge as it tries to meet the demand—from the applicants and from public health agencies. We are also examining ways to use distance/remote education to address gaps in training for the professionals in state and local public health agencies, particularly those practicing in rural and underserved communities. Similarly, our school recently launched a new Certificate Program in Rural Public Health, based at the school's UNC campus in Greeley, to prepare more students for practice in rural settings.

With the pandemic and in its aftermath, there is an evident need to learn from the pandemic and using the “lessons learned” to re-imagine public health. In a paper published in the *American Journal of Public Health* a year ago, my colleagues and I wrote to set out a broad and bold strategy for the next five years. Such discussions are underway in Colorado among the key stakeholders. The Colorado School of Public Health intends to be an active participant in these discussions and in helping to find remedies to the gaps surfaced by and created by the pandemic. We view meeting Colorado's public health workforce needs as central to our mission: “To promote the physical, mental, social, and environmental health of people and communities in the Rocky Mountain Region, across our nation, and globally.”