

Sustainable Career Pathways for Contact Tracers- June 2020



Health & Medicine
POLICY RESEARCH GROUP

Introduction

Contact tracing is a part of a multipronged approach to slowing the spread of COVID 19. Contact tracing has a long history of success in the field of public health, particularly in the control of STDs & tuberculosis. Over the next few months cities all across the nation will begin the process of rapidly hiring and deploying contact tracers in some of the hardest hit communities. Contact tracing positions will provide an opportunity to improve equity in our state if hiring is prioritized to those most impacted by COVID 19 including formerly incarcerated persons, people from geographically hardest hit neighborhoods, people of color, people with disabilities and those who have lost their jobs. Contact tracer jobs are entry level and generally only require a high school diploma or GED, professional attitude, interpersonal skills and proficiency with computers. Contact tracers will have an opportunity to provide a critical service to their community while in some cases earning full-time pay and benefits.

It's unclear how long the COVID-19 pandemic will last but experts agree that eventually COVID-19 will be past us and we will get back to some sense of normalcy. But what does this mean for the thousands of contact tracers? Undoubtedly some will remain in public health departments and community organizations in contact tracing and community health organizations, and we will have several thousand specialized workers with potentially

no other contact tracing responsibilities. These workers should be provided the opportunity to take classes and stack their credentials while deployed in the COVID 19 effort. This will ensure they have sustainable career pathways and opportunities for continued employment.

Scaling up our Public Health Workforce

The pandemic is underscoring the gaps in our public health infrastructure that are contributing to health inequities. The US has seen a consistent decrease in funding for public health funding over the past 43 years; in 2017 public health represented just 2.5%, or \$274.00 per person of all spending in the country.* The lack of public health funding undermines our ability to implement evidence based interventions to prevent disease & injury, and prepare for public health emergencies. The public health workforce nationally has seen a 250,000 decrease in the past two decades. Additionally, limited funding for public health contributes to shortages in the critical workforce. The Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) reports that the United States has a critical shortage of workers, in a variety of fields, and this shortage is expected to increase because of our aging population in need of greater care, increases in chronic disease, limited capacity of education programs, and our retiring workforce.† Contact tracers can play a key role in helping to rebuild our public health workforce if given the opportunity to advance their education during the COVID 19 response.

* https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TFAH_2019_PublicHealthFunding_07.pdf

† <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/health-workforce-analysis/research/projections>

This chart provides a list of potential career pathways for contact tracers and the represents careers that are in high need of professionals.

Career	Description	Cost of Education & Training	Duration of Education & Training	Education Requirements	Median Average Wage
Contact Tracer	Contact tracer notify individuals of their exposure to infected people, and help to ensure the safe, sustainable, and effective quarantine of contacts to prevent additional transmission. The workforce can transition to vaccine communication when vaccine is available.	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	High School Degree/ GED Equivalent	NA
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	Home health and personal care aides help people who are disabled, chronically ill, or cognitively impaired with activities such as bathing, dressing and taking medication.	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	High School Degree/ GED Equivalent	\$24,200
Case Manager	Case managers work to facilitate patient care by assessing patient needs, evaluating treatment options, creating treatment plans, coordinating care, and gauging progress	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	High School Degree/ GED Equivalent	\$35,060
Medical Office Administrator	Medical office administrators perform routine clerical and organizational tasks. They organize files, draft messages, schedule appointments and support other staff.	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	High School Degree/ GED Equivalent	\$35,760
Health Information Technician	Health Information Technicians maintain accurate, secure and accessible information systems for medical professionals and institutions.	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	High School Degree/ GED Equivalent	\$40,350

Community Health Worker	Community health workers conduct outreach for medical personnel or health organizations to implement programs in the community that promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health.	Less than \$10,000	Less than 1 year	Basic Certificate	\$40,360
Emergency Medical Technician	EMT's and paramedics care for the sick or injured in emergency medical settings and transport patients to medical facilities.	\$10,000-\$30,000	1 to 2 years	Basic Certificate	\$35,400
Medical Assistant	Medical assistants complete administrative and clinical tasks in healthcare settings.	Less than 10,000	Less than 1 year	Advanced Certificate	\$34,800
Dental Assistant	Dental assistants work alongside dentists to prepare patients for procedures, help during procedures and complete administrative office tasks.	Less than \$10,000	1 to 2 years	Advanced Certificate	\$40,080
Dental Hygienist	Dental assistants work alongside dentists to prepare patients for procedures, help during procedures and complete administrative office tasks.	Less than 10,000	1 to 2 years	Associate Degree	\$76,220
Lab Technicians	Clinical laboratory technologists and technicians collect samples and perform tests to analyze body fluids, tissue, and other substances.	\$10,000-\$30,000	3 to 4 years	Associate/bachelor's degree	\$53,120
Substance Abuse & Behavioral Disorder Counselors	Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors advise people with alcoholism or other types of addiction such as eating disorders, drug abuse or behavioral problems.	\$30,000-\$40,000	4 Years	Master's degree	\$46,240
Registered Nurse	Registered nurses are trained to promote health and the prevention of disease and helps patients cope with illness.	\$50,000-\$70,000	3 to 4 years	Associate/bachelor's degree	\$73,300

