

ASPPH Talking Points

Protecting Public Health Professional Degrees: What Congress Needs to Know

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me about an extremely urgent matter facing the public health community right now.

The Department of Education's recent proposal to exclude public health degrees, including Master of Public Health (MPH) and Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) programs, from the definition of "professional degree" under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), threatens student access, program stability, and the strength of the public health workforce.

We urge congressional engagement to ensure these degrees remain fully recognized and supported.

Discuss Why Public Health Professional Degrees Matter

- Public health degrees, particularly MPHs and DrPHs, prepare leaders who protect communities, respond to public health emergencies, and strengthen health systems.
- Public health graduates fill essential roles in state and local health departments, hospitals, federal agencies, and community organizations.
- Recognition as "professional degrees" ensures students can access the financial support they need to enter the public health workforce.

Discuss Concerns with the Department of Education's Proposal

- Students may lose access to higher federal loan limits and other benefits tied to professional degree status. Increased financial barriers could reduce enrollment or prevent students from completing their degrees.
- Federal agencies, accrediting bodies, employers, and states consistently already treat the MPH and DrPH as professional credentials required for practice. For example, the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), recognized by the Department of Education, already recognizes public health degrees (MPH and DrPH) as "professional degrees."
- "Professional degrees" are defined as academic programs that prepare graduates for specific professions requiring advanced knowledge and applied skills.
- Public health degrees, including the MPH and DrPH, meet this definition because they provide specialized training for roles in epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, health policy, health education, emergency preparedness, and other public health practice areas."
- We are fighting for nothing less than the health and longevity of public health. Without reasonable financial support, public health as a field of study could cease to exist. Public health workforce shortages could worsen, especially in underserved and rural communities.

Your "Asks" to Congress

1. Congress Should Increase Oversight and Engagement

- We request that Congress examine the Department of Education's proposal and its potential harm to the public health workforce.
- We ask that you urge the Department of Education to revise its definition so that public health professional degrees are appropriately included and treated consistently with other professional degrees.

2. Congress Should Act to Protect the Professional Status of Public Health Degrees

- We ask that you consider introducing or supporting legislative clarification to ensure that MPH, DrPH, and related degrees remain fully eligible for all federal support tied to professional degree status.
- We ask that you convey your concerns directly to the Department of Education and reinforce the need to recognize public health degrees as professional degrees.

3. Congress Should Review and Consider Institutional Impact Data

- We ask that your office review the student impact data that ASPPH institutions are preparing, including effects on student debt, financial aid eligibility, enrollment, and workforce readiness.

4. Ask if the office can weigh in with their respective Authorizers and Appropriators after they've contacted the Department of Education in an effort to create more awareness of the issue and our concerns.

Thank you for meeting with me today. Please let me know if I can serve as a resource moving forward.

Impact Examples to Share

- Projected number of MPH/DrPH students facing reduced financial support at your institution
- Average student debt levels and estimated financial gap per student under the new definition
- Local workforce needs that depend on public health graduates
- Stories from students, alumni, or employers in your district or state