



Public Health Code of Ethics

Ethical practice in the field of public health is central to carrying out the essential public health functions and services of our profession. Public health professionals are charged and entrusted with preventing disease and protecting the public's health. To do so, we must apply ethical considerations and engage in deliberative decision-making based on moral and justice-based standards of the field.

The following is a code of ethics for public health professionals adapted from the American Public Health Association's principles of ethical practice for the University at Buffalo's Master of Public Health (UB MPH) students. The following principles should guide ethical decision-making, actions and implementation in the field. These principles are not exhaustive; they serve as a foundation and roadmap to guide ethical public health practice. **Adherence to this code is expected of all UB MPH students.**

Address the causes of disease and requirements for health.

Prevent, minimize and mitigate health harms. Promote and protect public safety, health and well-being. Develop public health policies and plans to support these ethical responsibilities using community input and research-based data.

Respect the rights of individuals.

Special care should be taken to ensure that affected individuals and communities are respected and afforded appropriate ethical consideration during the development and implementation of policies and plans related to their health.

Ensure input from community members.

Empower community members and stakeholders to be active participants in the decision-making process. Balance perceived needs with expressed and expert-defined needs to improve community health. Collectively search for a morally appropriate way forward.

Advocate for and empower the disenfranchised.

Seek to enhance resilience, efficacy, and agency in

individuals and communities. Promote improved access to social resources conducive to health and health care. Work within the law but strive to change laws through civic and judicial processes in ways that serve the needs, rights and well-being of individuals and society at large.

Seek information needed to protect and promote health.

Conduct and disseminate community health assessments. Investigate health problems and environmental public health hazards to protect populations and individuals.

Provide communities with information.

Inform and educate the public about health issues and functions using thoughtful transparency. Provide communities with reasoning and evidence behind public health programs and policies using strategies that protect individual privacy and avoid public panic.

Act in a timely manner.

Detect, recognize, and acknowledge public health threats promptly and efficiently. Use resources efficiently and effectively.

Respect and include diversity.

Include and engage a diverse group of affected individuals, communities and stakeholders in the public health decision-making process. Attend to the needs of diverse audiences.

Enhance the physical and social environment.

Enforce public health laws. Advocate against and remediate structural and institutional forms of domination that create and perpetuate inequities and inequalities.

Protect the confidentiality that protects the public.

Have safeguards in place so that public health information does not harm individuals or communities.

Ensure professional competence.

Commit to utilizing continuous quality improvement approaches. Evaluate and continuously improve public health processes, programs, and interventions. Contribute to and apply the evidence base of public health. Maintain public health leadership and ethical integrity. Use power and authority judiciously and with humility. Promote ethical integrity, dignity and respect in all relationships.

Collaborate and affiliate in effective ways.

Engage with the community to identify and address health problems. Maintain capacity to engage with public health governing entities. Foster positive relationships and mitigate negative relationships.

References

American Public Health Association. (2019). Public Health Code of Ethics. [apha.org. https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/membergroups/ethics/code_of_ethics.ashx](https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/membergroups/ethics/code_of_ethics.ashx)

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