

National Public Health Week: A Celebration With Purpose

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National Public Health Week (NPHW), organized by the American Public Health Association (APHA) since 1995, is our nation's annual opportunity to bolster awareness and support for the field by recognizing the numerous ways public health touches people's lives. During the first full week of April each year, members of the public health community and a range of partners celebrate the spectrum of public health with activities that educate and inspire.

Since its inception, NPHW has expanded its reach and enhanced its impact. The week's focus has shifted from high-level theory and policy to grassroots efforts that allow more people to examine their role in improving the health of their communities. During the first all-virtual NPHW in 2020, participants expressed their creativity online, holding fitness classes, watch parties, and informational sessions to maintain the connectedness associated with the week.

The 2021 NPHW theme, "Building Bridges to Better Health," invites everyone to join in support of public health at a time when such support is greatly needed. The systems meant to protect the public's health have been neglected and broken. Public health authority has been eroded by disinformation and misinformation, resulting in distrust of health officials and guidelines. Vulnerable populations continue to be disproportionately harmed by a host of health and societal factors, including structural racism. These factors have recently exposed themselves for the world to see through the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, climate change, and police violence. The pandemic has shed light on the critical need for well-resourced public health systems that can work

together, across sectors, to more equitably improve the public's health.

How Health Departments Benefit From Participation in NPHW

Health departments have a menu of options for celebrating NPHW that can be adapted to individual community needs. APHA provides a range of tools and resources, including fact sheets, social media shareables, and tool kits that make participation a relatively easy lift. Activities such as the Keep It Moving Challenge and the APHA-hosted NPHW Twitter Chat simply require that participants log in to connect with hundreds of fellow public health enthusiasts.

These offerings, designed to be fun and accessible, serve a greater purpose. NPHW can be used as part of health departments' strategies to build sustained support for public health, starting with getting people excited about the field and seeing a place for themselves within it. Through NPHW, public health agencies have a launchpad for advocacy and communication about the field that can go beyond 1 week. Here's how:

- *Show the role of all sectors in supporting public health.*

All sectors can participate in NPHW, including those that are underrepresented in traditional public health systems. This year's event begins with the Monday theme of "Rebuilding," which has multiple meanings—rebuilding public health authority, trust in scientific expertise, and health systems. The day also serves to honor workers and leaders who represent the built community. NPHW helps communities expand their sense of what is within the purview of public health. For example, when so many people are working and learning from home, broadband and high-speed Internet access is a public health concern—one that primarily affects people with lower incomes and those living in rural areas.

NPHW 2021 also features a day dedicated to elevating the essential and health workforces.

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Workers who have made enduring the COVID-19 pandemic possible—from grocery store employees stocking shelves and working registers to environmental services staff who keep health care facilities and other public spaces clean and safe—contribute to the health of the public. NPHW is a time to acknowledge and honor sectors that are not well recognized and consider how they can be involved in community partnerships.

- *Help people engage with public health on their terms.*

A background in public health is not necessary to participate in NPHW; people with all interests and skill sets have a place in the celebration. Health departments can tailor their NPHW activities to their communities, whether they choose to focus on disease prevention, health equity, or other priorities. No matter how health departments observe NPHW, every activity helps community members learn about what public health entails and how they might regularly contribute to local health promotion efforts.

- *Motivate people to advocate for investments in public health.*

Each day of NPHW demonstrates to communities the ways that the public health system is working for them. And when people understand how public health works, they are more likely to be advocates for the field.

One of the most impactful forms of advocacy is engaging with policy at the local level, and NPHW

gives people the tools to explain to their elected leaders why public health is a critical investment. Community members can point to congressional resolutions for NPHW that show how policy makers value public health and use APHA's sample language for local resolutions to take to city and state leaders.

- *Help communities connect with their local public health agencies.*

While local health departments play an influential role in the health and wellness of the communities they serve, few residents understand what these agencies do and even fewer have regular contact with them. Creating a positive interaction with local health departments is especially critical considering rising levels of hostility toward government agencies. With NPHW as an entry point, health departments can connect with community-based organizations that are already engaged with residents, building trust and inviting more groups into the public health fold.

NPHW may only be held for 1 week annually, but its underlying message is that public health deserves to be uplifted every day. Health departments are well positioned to show the depth and breadth of public health, and NPHW helps spark these important conversations with community members. With NPHW, health departments have the tools, resources, and inspiration to champion their causes and engage in multisector collaborations all year long.