



# The State of the Supervisory Workforce

## Introduction

Within the government public health workforce, supervisors play a pivotal role, operating at the intersection of workforce development, team functioning, and agency operations. Through these responsibilities, they not only support policy implementation and drive organizational change, but also shape the day-to-day workplace experience. The insights and experiences of supervisors are central to the success of public health initiatives. Supportive supervisory practices are linked to higher staff morale and workplace satisfaction (Popalis et al., 2025). Understanding their experiences and needs has implications for those in leadership roles and the workforce as a whole.

This data brief highlights key findings from the 2024 Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS), focusing on the state of the supervisory workforce. Respondents who identified themselves as supervisors, managers, or executives (referred to as supervisors) answered an additional set of questions specific to the experiences of employees in supervisory roles. PH WINS is the only nationally representative source of self-reported information on the state and local government public health workforce. Conducted by the de Beaumont Foundation and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) from September 2024 to January 2025, the 2024 survey collected responses from nearly 60,000 state and local government public health staff, including nearly 16,000 supervisors.



The Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS) supports the government public health workforce by measuring strengths and gaps to inform future investments in funding, training, recruitment, and retention. Conducted in 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2024, PH WINS is the only nationally representative source of data about the government public health workforce.

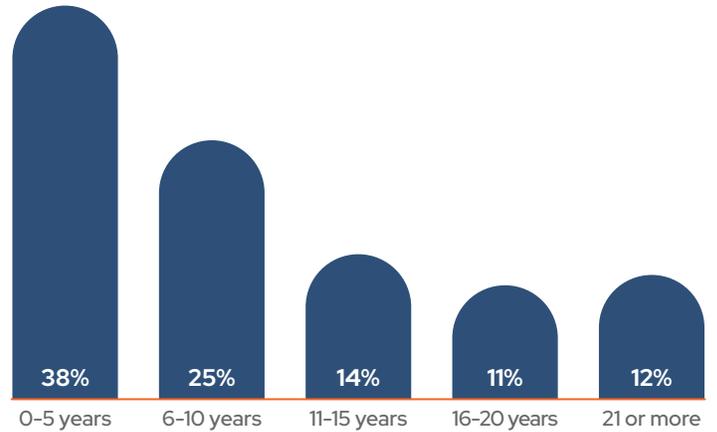
## Key Findings

### Supervisors have years of public health experience but are newer to supervisory roles.

The majority of supervisors (57%) are between the ages of 35 and 55. More than half (58%) have worked in public health practice for over a decade, while 22% have been in the field for five years or less. Less than one-third (27%) possess formal public health training, and 40% hold a master's degree.

Most supervisors are relatively new to their current roles: 66% have held their current position for five years or less, and 36% have been at their current agency for five years or less. Additionally, 38% have spent five years or less in public health management, and 46% report five years or less of supervisory experience prior to their current position.

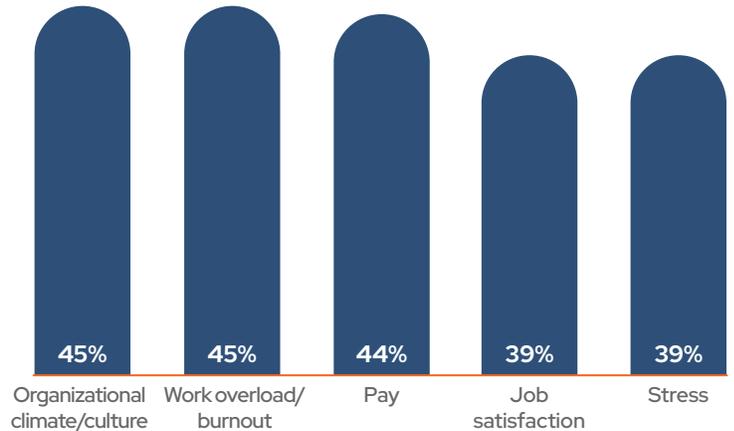
Tenure in Public Health Management



### One in five supervisors (20%) plan to leave their agency within the year.

Among supervisors, 20% reported plans to leave their agency within the next year. Of those, 27% intend to pursue another job in government public health, while 17% plan to transition into a non-government role in the field. Additionally, 34% anticipated leaving public health entirely. Compared with non-supervisory staff, supervisors are more likely to cite organizational climate/culture and work overload/burnout as reasons for leaving. Forty-five percent of supervisors identified organizational climate/culture as a reason, compared with 34% of non-supervisory staff. Similarly, 45% of supervisors reported work overload/burnout, compared with 34% of non-supervisory staff.

Top 5 Reasons Supervisors Intend to Leave Their Agency



### Burnout and workload pressures are widespread among supervisors.

More than one-third (37%) of supervisors said they are unable to complete their work within normal working hours, and two-thirds (66%) indicated that they often take on responsibilities beyond their job descriptions. Fewer than half reported having sufficient staffing (49%) or funding (46%) to fulfill the essential functions of their work unit.



79% of supervisors reported 1+ symptoms of burnout.



24% reported near-constant symptoms.



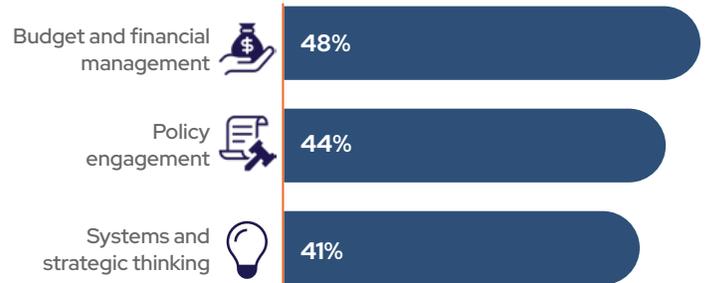
## Supervisors report strong programmatic expertise but note gaps in broader leadership competencies.

PH WINS respondents rated the importance of approximately 25 skills to their work, as well as their proficiency in skills deemed very or moderately important. Strategic strengths are defined as skills that supervisors rate as both highly important and proficient, while training needs are those of high importance but low proficiency. Supervisors most frequently reported strategic strengths in effective communication (97%), programmatic expertise (95%), and data-based decision-making (94%).

Despite these strengths, supervisors reported training needs in key leadership and system-level competencies. The most commonly cited gaps were in budget and financial management (48%), policy engagement (44%), and systems and strategic thinking (41%). These training needs are consistent with those reported across the public health workforce nationally.

Just over half of supervisors (55%) reported receiving leadership training at the start of their roles, and 60% received organizational training during onboarding. Many indicated that their agency provides ongoing support for supervisors (69%) and time to address training needs (80%), but there are more opportunities to strengthen leadership development.

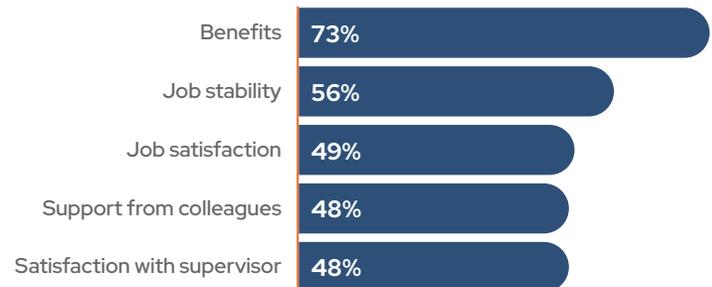
### Top Training Needs



## Most supervisors plan to stay in their organization, with benefits and stability driving retention.

Most supervisors (75%) indicated their intention to remain with their current organization. Benefits were the most commonly cited reason for staying (73%), followed by job stability (56%) and job satisfaction (49%). Supportive relationships also played a significant role in retention, with nearly half (48%) citing support from colleagues and satisfaction with their supervisor (48%) as factors influencing their decision to stay.

### Top 5 Reasons Supervisors Are Staying in Their Agency



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## Supervisors report strong engagement in practices that support staff and foster growth.

Leadership engagement among supervisors is reflected in a variety of supportive practices. Nearly all prioritize building trust with their teams (98%), seek to empower staff (97%), and communicate clear expectations to those they supervise (95%). Most supervisors feel accountable for both the overall success of their teams or departments

(94%) and the success of individual staff members (92%). Ninety-one percent also make time to connect with staff beyond work-related matters. Additionally, many supervisors report being responsible for developing future leaders (88%) and providing stretch assignments to encourage staff growth (72%).

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### Conclusion

Supervisors are essential to the strength and sustainability of the government public health workforce, providing critical guidance to staff, coordinating key functions, and supporting agency operations. The 2024 PH WINS findings reveal that while many supervisors bring significant public health experience to their roles, a large share are relatively new to supervisory and management positions.

The data highlights several pressing challenges facing this workforce. Notably, 20% of supervisors reported plans to leave their agency within the next year, with nearly half attributing their decision to work overload. These pressures coincide with broader capacity constraints such as limited staffing and funding.

To support and sustain supervisors, agencies may benefit from strategies that address work overload and burnout while enhancing training and support systems. The findings point to opportunities to expand preparation and ongoing development in areas such as budget and financial management, policy engagement, and systems-level thinking. There is also a need to strengthen leadership and

organizational training during onboarding and throughout supervisors' careers.

Encouragingly, the findings also point to important strengths. Most supervisors reported satisfaction with their job (85%), work unit (89%), and benefits (85%), and three-quarters plan to remain in their current roles. Supervisors demonstrate strong engagement in practices that support staff and foster growth, including building trust, communicating clear expectations, taking accountability for team and individual success, and supporting staff development through stretch assignments. Collectively, these results indicate that despite ongoing challenges, supervisors remain committed to their teams and organizations.

Looking ahead, understanding the experiences and needs of supervisors will be critical to maintaining leadership capacity within public health agencies. As workforce demands continue to evolve, supervisors will remain essential to supporting staff, sustaining operations, and strengthening the government public health workforce.

## Methodology

The Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS) was developed by the de Beaumont Foundation and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) to understand the interests and needs of the state and local government public health workforce in the United States, and was fielded in 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2024.

The 2024 survey was distributed online to 159,627 state and local government public health workers, representing 48 state health agencies and 1,178 local health departments of varying sizes across 48 states. In total, 219 large local health departments (staff size > 25 and serving a population > 250,000), 424 medium local health departments (staff size > 25 and serving a population of 25,000 to 250,000), and 535 small local health departments (staff size < 25 or serving a population < 25,000) participated in the survey.

Through partnerships with the 10 Regional Public Health Training Centers, the Big Cities Health Coalition, and the State Associations of County and City Health Officials in North Dakota, Montana, and New Jersey, the PH WINS sample size of local health departments more than quadrupled from 2021 to 2024. The survey was completed by 56,959 employees, for a 37% response rate of eligible employees.<sup>1</sup>

For more information, visit [www.phwins.org](http://www.phwins.org).

<sup>1</sup> Employees whose emails bounced or failed, or those who left the agency during the administration of the survey, were deemed ineligible (n=6,075).

## Next for PH WINS

Completed results from PH WINS 2024, including a redesigned dashboard with dynamic visualization, can be found on [phwins.org](http://phwins.org). Other topics covered in the survey include:

- The state of the epidemiology workforce, including training needs specific to the discipline;
- Workforce demographics by age, ethnicity, sex, tenure, education, and more;
- Workforce characteristics such as supervisory status, program area, and job type;
- Training needs and strengths based on the recommended [Strategic Skills for Public Health Practice](#);
- Guidance for recruiting and retaining a skilled and effective workforce; and
- Strategic insights for developing skilled managers in government public health.

Suggested citation: "The State of the Supervisory Workforce," de Beaumont Foundation. March 2026.

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