



DIRECTORS of PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING

Position Paper On The Role Of Public Health Nurses In Achieving Health Equity

Public health nursing is a major contributor to the elimination of health inequities across California. Public Health Nurses (PHN) play a critical role in advocating for the health, safety, and rights of the population. The Directors of Public Health Nursing (DPHN) are committed to the achievement of health equity and optimal health for all. We will work to eliminate disparities in health among populations based upon socioeconomic status, gender, race/ethnicity, residency status or class.

Nurses were early innovators in recognizing the importance of culture in health, evidenced through the professions' work in transcultural nursing. Inherent to the values of nursing is equity and social justice, evolving from direct experience with populations at the turn of the 20th Century. Nurses have long known that sustainable improvements in population health require addressing health needs of populations which are affected by social and environmental conditions.

Public health nursing practice is population-focused, community-oriented and works in partnership with individuals, organizations, communities, states, and nations, providing dual leadership in nursing and in public health. PHNs lead and collaborate in culturally competent initiatives to increase healthcare access for underserved and at-risk populations. Programs and services are developed to meet the needs of high-risk populations and the broader community through the core public health functions of assessment, assurance, and policy development. PHNs advocate for appropriate funding for services and participate in the development of local regulations to protect communities and the environment from potential hazards. Our practice acknowledges that population health is influenced by economics, policies, laws, politics and culture, all of which promote or deter optimal health and influence lifestyle choices.

PHN practice includes a set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that work effectively in cross-cultural care. Flexibility and respect for alternative view points are essential components of cultural sensitivity and competence. PHN practice is respectful of stated and implied needs and preferences of the clients and the communities we serve. Public health nurses work within and between systems that support diversity and promote equity in health outcomes. PHNs positively affect health determinants, the circumstances in which people are born, live, work, age, and the health care system, through interdisciplinary and intersectoral interventions based upon community-centered priorities. PHN practice promotes health equity through:

- Encouraging national, state and local policies that promote health. Supporting the creation of healthy environments –the foundation for a socio-ecological approach to health.

- Strengthening community action – by building collaborative strategies such as public priority setting, decision making, planning, and implementation.

PHNs work in partnership with education, housing, transportation, business, city planners, community agencies, and elected officials to address the physical, economic, cultural, psychological, and social factors contributing to health disparities. These alliances assist in identifying health problems that can be addressed by community groups. PHN's are skilled at articulating and explaining complex health issues to the general public. PHN's support community collaboration and action by convening groups of community service providers identifying shared concerns and facilitating change. PHN's do this through their knowledge of our system, their leadership skills and mentoring leadership in the community. These partnerships focus on strengths paving the way for health achievements.

One of the hallmarks of Public Health nursing practice is the provision of high quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate health care services for all. Public health nurses represent the ideal professional to address health disparities because of their work in schools, homes, clinics, jails, shelters, and other community venues. Public health nurses accomplish this work based on evidence-based practice and the competencies of leadership; health policy development and implementation; system improvement and research. Public health nurses have a responsibility to continually examine and reflect upon the privilege of their position, education, and socio-economic status; use this self-awareness in their practice to embrace difference, diversity, and alternative perspectives; educate the public and elected about the need for public policy that recognizes systemic barriers and strives for inclusion and positive change; and suggest, develop, support and implement agency and public policies that honor and celebrate diversity.