New Hampshire Health Officers Association

October 29, 2025

Representative Mark Pearson, Chair Mark.Pearson@gc.nh.gov:
Health and Human Oversight Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 205-207
33 North State Street
Concord NH 03301

RE: New Hampshire State Readiness Report on Local Health Officers

Dear Representative Pearson,

Enclosed please find the *New Hampshire State Readiness Report* on Local Health Officers for the period of November 1, 2024, to October 31, 2025. This report is required under state law as per: **RSA 128:11.**

Reporting Requirement. Beginning November 1, 2021, and annually thereafter, the New Hampshire Health Officers Association, in consultation with the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, shall report to the joint legislative oversight committee on health and human services, established in RSA 126-A:13, and the state health assessment and state health improvement plan advisory council, established in RSA 126-A:88, regarding the readiness of municipal health officers to respond to potential public health threats in New Hampshire.

The New Hampshire Health Officers Association Board of Directors is available to meet with your committee, discuss the Readiness report and answer any questions that the committee may have.

Please contact me with information on when the committee will be meeting to review the readiness report so that I and members of the New Hampshire Health Officers Association Board may attend.

Sincerely

Wayne R. Whitford

Wayne R. Whitford, President
New Hampshire Health Officers Association
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New Hampshire
Health Officers Association

State of New Hampshire
Readiness Report on Local Health Officers

Reporting Period
November 1, 2024, to October 31, 2025

Completed by

New Hampshire Health Officers Association

in partnership with

NH Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health
Bureau of Public Health Protection
Health Officer Liaison Unit

Wayne Whitford, President
wrwhitford@aol.com (603) 748-1583

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To promote high standards of professionalism among municipal and regional health officers through programs of education, technical assistance, legislative representation, and collaboration with public health colleagues.

About New Hampshire's Local Health Officers

The Local Health Officer (LHO) is a municipal employee or volunteer, appointed by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS), to serve a 3-year term. This municipal official is an important point of contact for local concerns and fulfills a critical role in investigating public health issues and enforcing public health laws. As secretary and executive officer of the local board of health for the town, the LHO responds to concerns and issues as directed by municipal leadership and completes inspections at the request of state agencies. Through inspections, guidance, enforcement, and rulemaking, the health officer helps to promote safe and healthy environments for people to live in.

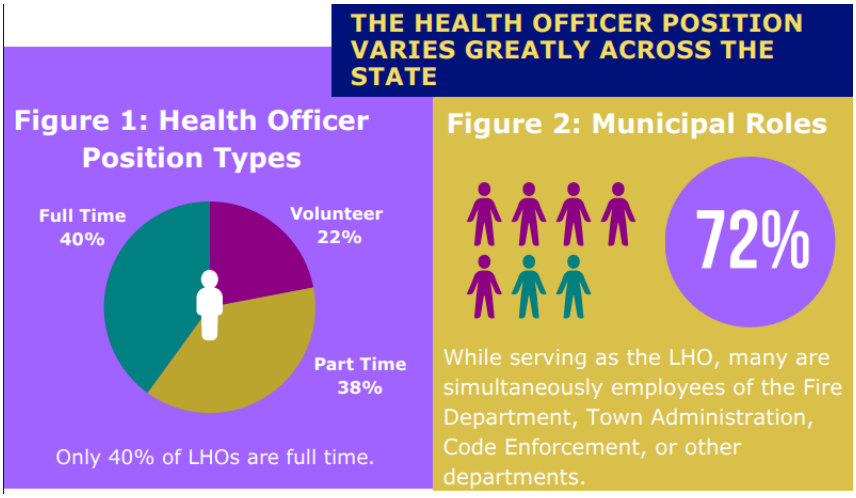
Highlights of the 2025 State Readiness Report on Local Health Officers[1]

- 40% of NH's 281 health officers report that they are full-time employees.
- 72% of these health officers report serving in multiple municipal roles where health officer is not their primary duty.
- 68% of these health officer report that they engage in emergency preparedness
- 70% of these health officers report spending less than 9 hours a week on health officer related activities.
- Consistent with prior years, there continues to be a wide degree of readiness for LHOs to respond to public health concerns depending on the size and location of the community.

Section 1: Number and Type of Local Health Officers

New Hampshire currently has 281 appointed health officers with a vacancy rate of about 13%.

As required in RSA 128:1, all New Hampshire towns are required to nominate a health officer to serve for a 3-year term in their municipality. These nominations are sent to the NH DHHS for official appointments. It is important to note that roughly **72%** of health officers report serving in multiple municipal roles (including fire chief, building inspector, welfare office, etc.). As a result, LHOs often juggle numerous responsibilities and divide their time between multiple positions[1].



[1] NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Program, *Health Officer Demographic and Workload Survey,* 2025.

Section 2: Health Officer Areas of Response

Local health officers work to address hazards that pose public health threats to their communities. Under State Laws RSA 128 and RSA 147, LHOs are given authority to:

- Make sanitary investigations (RSA 128);
- Enforce public health laws (RSA 128); and
- Inquire into the causes of danger to the public health (RSA 147).

With this authority, we find that in practice health officers respond to a wide range of health concerns, including the following:



However, as a result of serving in multiple municipal roles or being less than full time, more than 70% of LHOs spend less than 9 hours a week on health officer activities[2].

Section 3: Readiness to Response via Training and Certifications

As required in RSA 128:8, all LHOs must complete a 3-hour training course provided by NH DHHS on the roles, responsibilities, and legislative authority provided to them. As of October 1st, 2025, sixty-five percent (65%) of health officers have completed or are enrolled in this required training [3].

In addition to this training, the NH Health Officer Association (NHHOA) emphasizes the importance of continued and improved training for health officers to be successful in their roles and better equipped to respond to public health threats. As a result, NHHOA supports the NH DHHS, Health Officer Liaison Unit (HOLU) who provides routine training opportunities and training resources. The NHHOA supports the HOLU by reviewing and providing technical feedback on its Health Officer Guidance Documents, attends virtual training sessions, and encourages members to attend HOLU's training opportunities. The NHHOA pulls their membership together twice annually, which draws over 80 of the state's LHOs.

[2] NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Program, *Health Officer Demographic and Workload Survey,* 2025.

[3] NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Program, Cornerstone Learning Management System, 2025

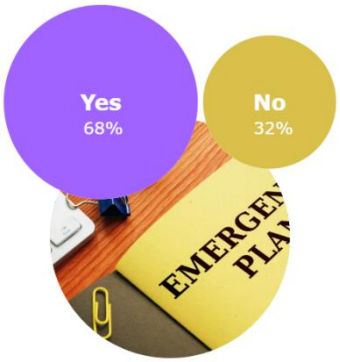
At the spring conference on May 21, 2025, in Manchester, NH the following topics were presented:

Presenter	Workshop Topic
NH Department of Environmental Services	Let's Do It Asbestos We Can!
NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Unit	Health Officer Liaison Update
NH Department of Environmental Services	Healthy Swimming in New Hampshire
NH Municipal Association	Municipal Association Information and Legislative Updates
NH DHHS Bureau of Disease Control	Tick Testing and Community Health
NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Unit	Health Officer Case Study Review

At the NHHOA's fall Annual Meeting, held on October 1, 2025 in Manchester covered the following topics:

Presenter	Workshop Topic
Regional Public Health Network & NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Unit	Regional Public Health Networks and the local health officer
NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Unit	Health Officer Liaison Update
NH Department of Environmental Services	Subsurface Bureau Update
NH Department of Education	Health Officials Working Together on School Approvals
NH Municipal Association	Right to Know Record Requests

SECTION 4: Readiness to Respond to Regional Public Health Threats



Survey data shows that 68% of LHOs participate in municipal emergency preparedness and response activities. These activities include participating in developing local emergency response plans, communicating public health emergency information to their residents, and participating in preparedness drills [4].

In addition to municipal activities, many emergency response functions are supported and organized by the State's Regional Public Health Networks (RPHNs). As a result, HOLU and the NHHOA encourage health officers to become active members of their RPHNs to engage in regional emergency planning and response activities. However, only 33% of health officers report participating in RPHN emergency preparedness activities[4]. The HOLU and NHHOA continue to organize meetings and promote training for health officers to understand their potential role within the RPHNs.

SECTION 5: Support for Local Health Officers

To help ensure that LHOs are prepared to respond to situations that may arise in their communities, the HOLU is staffed by a full-time Program Manager and a part-time Health Officer Specialist. In addition to managing LHO appointments, staff organize monthly trainings, develop topic-specific guidance documents, manage a private list serve, offer virtual training opportunities, and provide technical assistance. LHOs report this in an invaluable program at the NH DHHS.

In addition, LHOs are supported locally by their local municipal Boards of Health, which by statute is comprised of the local selectboard and the health officer. This municipal body is intended to provide guidance, prioritize issues, and support the health officer in ensuring sanitary conditions are present within the municipality.

Finally, the NHHOA is a private membership organization that works to promote high standards of professionalism among municipal health officers through programs of education, technical assistance, legislative representation, and collaboration with public health colleagues**.** NHHOA works to ensure health officers have the appropriate training and supports necessary to respond to emergencies.

SECTION 6: SUMMARY

Data collected by the NH DHHS HOLU continues to highlight the reality that there is a wide degree of readiness for health officers to respond to public health concerns depending on the size and location of the community[4]. Many NH cities have full-time health professionals with associated public health budgets. However, many towns may have volunteer or part-time staff fulfilling several municipal roles. It is not uncommon for towns to utilize volunteers to fulfill the health officer role. It is reported that most towns do not have the necessary health officer budget. The NHHOA believes that health officers are important public health officials who perform essential public health activities. However, many LHOs do not have

[4] NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Program, *Health Officer Demographic and Workload Survey,* 2025.

the capacity or resources to effectively respond to all the concerns that may arise in their municipalities. As a result, the work of the health officer is executed very differently across the state according to staffing and budgets.

In summary, NHHOA advocates for the following:

- Expanded municipal or regional funding to enable more health officers to serve in at least part-time roles;
- Increased training opportunities for training health officers;
- Increased partnership opportunities for health officers and State agencies to ensure they have access to relevant and timely information; and
- Increased awareness amongst municipal, regional, and state decision-makers on of the important role that health officers play so policies are better informed as to the work and needs of this public health official.

As our State continues to strive for excellence in public health, our local health officers remain an invaluable asset to ensuring strong local public health response. We encourage our state officials and legislators to continue to support and promote this important work.

Appendix

About the NH Health Officer Association Board of Directors (as of October 24, 2025)

Executive Board of Directors
Wayne Whitford, President *(Town of Newbury)*
Brian Lockard, Vice President (*Town of Salem)*
Brian Santiago, Treasurer *(City of Concord)*
Liam Ehrenzweig, Secretary *(City of Lebanon)*
Board Members
Courtney Bogaert, Board Member *(Town of Derry)*
Lisa Bechok, Board Member *(Town of Pittsburg)*
Heidi E. Peek-Kukulka, Board Member *(City of Nashua)*
Madison Bailey, Exeter, Board Member *(Town of Exeter)*
Kendall Hughes, Board Member (*Town of Ashland)*
Angela Liberty, Board Member *(City of Berlin)*
Affiliate Non-Voting Representatives
Sophia Johnson, Program Manager (NH DHHS, Health Officer Liaison Unit)

Membership	
Members of NHHOA (as of 10/1/2025)	**204**

The NH Health Officers Association is guided by a 5-Year Strategic Action Plan developed in collaboration with the NH DHHS HOLU.

Mission of the NH Health Officers Association - To promote high standards of professionalism among municipal and regional health officers through programs of education, technical assistance, legislative representation, and collaboration with public health colleagues**.**

Vision of the NH Health Officers Association - To build, sustain, and empower a local public health workforce.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NH HEALTH OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

OBJECTIVE 1 Build a strong foundation of leadership that will guide the membership in the implementation of the strategic action plan.

OBJECTIVE 2 Create a conduit for strong communication between the board and membership that is ongoing, trusted, and valued.

OBJECTIVE 3 Recruit and retain Health officers and affiliate members to build a robust membership.

OBJECTIVE 4 Make professional development meaningful, accessible, and timely to ensure that local municipal Health officers are skilled, highly qualified public health professionals.

OBJECTIVE 5 Improve the ease of data collection on demographics, training needs, and enforcement activities of local municipal Health Officers.

OBJECTIVE 6 Ensure that the needs of Health officers across the state are represented in local and statewide policy development.

This report has been submitted to the NH Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, established in RSA 126-A:13, and the state Health Assessment and state Health Improvement Plan Advisory Council, established in RSA 126-A:88. This report can also be located on the NHHOA website at https://www.nhhealthofficers.org/.