The nationwide workforce in physical activity practice is a critical link for improving active living. The National Physical Activity Society’s (NPAS) biennial needs assessment survey of U.S. physical activity practitioners using public health approaches provides a snapshot of professionals in the workforce.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The purposes of the survey are to gain insight into who makes up the workforce and to identify their primary training needs. NPAS uses the responses as input for monthly webinar topics and to share information about needs with partners.

OBJECTIVES

91% respondents were white.

DESCRIPTION

Public Health Sector Strategy 1 of the National Physical Activity Plan calls for a competent and diverse public health workforce. NPAS surveyed physical activity practitioners in Spring 2016. We invited participation via NPAS’s e-mail list, three partners, and a listserv of CDC grantees. We stipulated a focus on public health approaches to physical activity to help potential respondents self identify for relevance. This survey was the fifth in a series dating from 2007.

Forty-two questions addressed demographics, background, time in physical activity work; connection to other national initiatives; and experience in competencies. We used skip logic to reduce response time, which pilot testers estimated at 20 minutes. 188 respondents from 44 states work in state and local health departments, nonprofits, universities, and other sectors.

LESSONS LEARNED

79% had Master’s degree or higher (same % as 2014).

58% had worked in PAPH more than 5 years.

91% respondents were white.

For 3 in 5 respondents, PAPH is less than half their job.

Important & Urgent Needs

Tops: Making the case, rural, & evaluation.

Evaluation ranked in top 2 PH desires for all subgroups.

Leadership ranked 2nd and includes cultivating champions.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The public health physical activity field needs more diversity. NPAS recommends that partners and universities recognize the need for racial diversity in the physical activity workforce.

Continuing education for physical activity practice can be targeted at a high level to appeal to long-serving highly educated workforce. Evaluation, leadership, rural areas, and making the case are consistently cited training needs. NPAS plans to conduct its next survey in Spring 2018.

NOTES


Survey conducted April-May 2016.
No governmental funds were used for this survey.