



# Assuring Excellence in Public Health

**Strategic Plan  
2022 – 2027**



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## A LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

The landscape of public health is evolving rapidly, and our challenges have never been greater. At the National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE), we are committed to advancing public health by providing a robust and credible certification program that empowers professionals and reinforces the importance of a skilled workforce.

Our 2022-2027 strategic plan has been updated to reflect the transformative changes NBPHE has made to enhance our offerings and to meet the demands of a dynamic public health environment. From expanding pathways to certification to incorporating innovative approaches that address emerging challenges, this plan lays out our vision for the future. It underscores our shared mission to strengthen the public health workforce and elevate the standards of practice through certification. This strategic plan represents more than just organizational goals; it embodies the collective aspirations of the public health community. It is a roadmap for collaboration, innovation, and progress. Achieving these objectives will require the dedication and support of all of us—board members, public health professionals, stakeholders, and the individuals certified by the NBPHE. I invite you to explore this updated strategic plan and consider how you can contribute to its success. Together, we can ensure that our public health credential programs continue to represent excellence and professionalism, fostering a stronger, more effective public health workforce for years to come. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to advancing the public health profession.



**Paul Halverson, DrPH,  
FACHE, CPH, Chair,  
NBPHE Board of Directors**



**Allison Foster, MBA, CAE,  
CPH, President**

Through the dedication of a committed board of directors, public health professionals who sit on our testing committees and a myriad of volunteers, we have developed a forward-looking certification program positioned to meet the needs of public health through the next decade. We are constantly re-evaluating our processes and purposefully give public health professionals an opportunity to be a part of our decision-making process. We embrace the philosophy that what our certification programs becomes is ultimately up to the public health community. This plan lays out the most important goals we need to achieve to ensure that public health certifications offered by the NBPHE are recognized as a standard of excellence for public health.

Now it will be important that we stay focused on the priorities of this plan. We understand that a critical element of success is to follow-through and hold ourselves accountable. We look forward to working with the public health community to make our goals and ideas come to life.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE) was established in September 2005 to ensure public health professionals have mastered the foundational knowledge and skills relevant to contemporary public health. The organization’s primary purpose is accomplished through the development and administration of a voluntary certification exam, as well as the maintenance of certification.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep-rooted issues within field of public health. These issues, coupled with an aging public health workforce and the dire need for enhanced efficiencies in public health practice, set the stage for our bold plan. There is an unprecedented need to professionalize the field, unite change-makers, develop communities of practice, and ensure stronger public health practice. The National Board of Public Health Examiners is prepared for the challenge.

Our Strategic Plan, **Assuring Excellence in Public Health**, provides a clear roadmap for the growth and development of our organization over the next five years. This plan focuses our efforts to assure excellence by professionalizing the field and increasing the number of CPH certified public health professionals, enhancing partnerships and outreach efforts, and ensuring a robust, sustainable, and adaptable organizational structure. Directly aligned with our mission and vision, these goals reflect our commitment to public health.

We are bold in our vision and steadfast in our resolve.

NBPHE’s Strategic Plan is a blueprint to catapult us forward as we aim to assure excellence in public health.

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*The success of this plan will be evident through:*

			
<b>Professionalization of the Field of Public Health</b>	<b>CPH Exam</b>	<b>Enhanced Partnerships</b>	<b>NBPHE Business Practices</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CPH as the standard of excellence</li><li>• Active CPH certification</li><li>• Schools &amp; programs require CPH</li><li>• CPH preferred on job listings</li><li>• Communities of Practice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rigorous, competency-based exam</li><li>• Job Task Analysis</li><li>• Bias Analysis</li><li>• Microcredentials</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marketing &amp; outreach plan</li><li>• Ambassador program</li><li>• Name and value recognition</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Robust, sustainable, adaptable organizational structure</li><li>• Achieve NCCA Accreditation</li></ul>

# NBPHE: A REVIEW OF OUR HISTORY

## Overview

The idea of the need for certification in public health is not a new one. Greenwood (1957) and Freidson (1970) summarized six characteristics of a profession:

1. formal education and training are required for membership in the profession;
2. there are regional or national associations;
3. there is a code of ethics;
4. there is a body of systematic scientific knowledge and technical skill required;
5. the members function with a degree of autonomy and authority under the assumption that they alone have the expertise to make decisions in their area of competence; and
6. credentialing is required reflecting community sanction or approval.

Prior to the establishment of the NBPHE, public health met the first five characteristics of a profession. With the establishment of NBPHE, and through a public health certification, the final characteristic of defining public health as a profession was met through communicating the competency of practitioners to the public as well as prospective employers.

In response to the 1988 IOM report, *The Future of Public Health*, the Surgeon General called for “credentialing of public health workers.” As a result, both the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) established a task force on credentialing.

Noting that other disciplines represented in the U.S. Public Health Service (e.g., physicians, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, etc.) have some type of state license or credential in addition to their degree, the Surgeon General also stated “But there is no such requirement for the practitioner of the key discipline of public health.” His comments resonated across the public health community. Indeed, there was acknowledgement that certification in public health was a missing critical element to the professionalization of public health.

This critical gap has been filled by NBPHE and our certification programs

## Certification is Critical to the Profession of Public Health

Certification provides public assurance that the certified individuals are competent to work in a given profession, no matter their individual educational or professional experience. Standards are set by an independently organized body of subject matter experts that determines the minimal knowledge and competence required of a professional

Among the most common rationale for certification programs are:

- protecting the public's interests;
- creating a common body of knowledge across the profession;
- encouraging certificants to pursue continuing education;
- differentiating between certified and non-certified individuals; and,
- assisting employers in making hiring decisions.

In public health, and during the current crises faced by our populations, this is particularly important. Most members of the public health workforce do not have formal training in public health. Certification is a way to ensure the knowledge and skills gained, whether through on-the-job experience or through informal or formal training, meet the standards set by the field. Because certification exams cover multiple domains, candidates must have a minimal knowledge of areas outside of their primary area of focus. This ensures that public health professionals with the CPH designation are more able to work in a meaningful way with colleagues with different disciplinary backgrounds and are better able to transition between scopes of work. Certainly, COVID-19 has again brought to light the need for the public health workforce to be agile and broad in their core knowledge.

## It's Time We Became a Profession

In June 2000, Sommer and Akhter penned an editorial, *It's Time We Became a Profession*. They described the need to align the public health profession with core competencies and values common to all public health professionals and outlined the vision of a task force assembled by the American Public Health Association and the Association of Schools of Public Health. They said: "Once it is clear that public health is a defined and organized profession, visibility, respect, and compensation of the public health workforce should all increase. So should the profession's impact on policy and legislation, in a voice more audible and coherent than ever before."

Though this idea seemed ambitious, given the multidisciplinary nature of a professional of public health, ASPH and APHA created an APHA/ASPH Task Force on Public Health Workforce Credentialing. After receiving encouragement from both the APHA and ASPH Executive Boards, the Task Force reached out to other stakeholders in the credentialing process and became the Steering Committee on Public Health Workforce Credentialing. Extensive planning discussions were held with ASPH, APTR, APHA, ASTHO, and NACCHO.

In 2005, the NBPHE was created as the independent credentialing organization for the public health profession. Today, NBPHE maintains a robust credentialing exam and serves as a leader in the professionalization of public health.

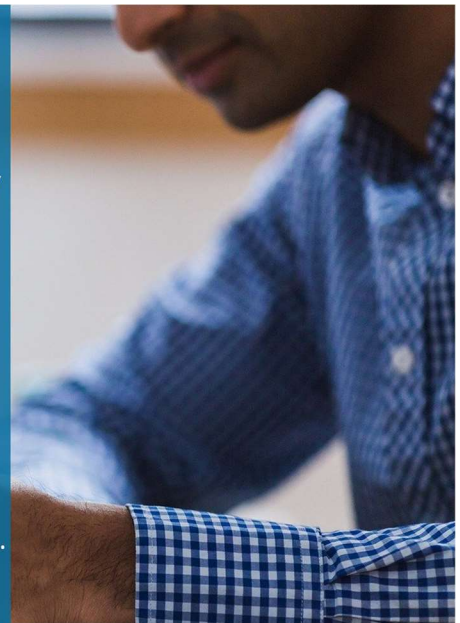
## A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

Since 2008, the NBPHE has certified more than 10,000 public health professionals. As of the date of this publication, 13 Council on Education of Public Health (CEPH) accredited schools and programs require all public health students to take the Certified in Public Health (CPH) examination. Adoption has increased as employers have begun to use CPH as a job requirement. Originally developed around the traditional 5 core public health knowledge areas, a 2016 job task analysis supported revision of the exam in 2019 to better align with the practice of public health. We are currently working on a number of new certifications as well which will further strengthen the public health workforce.

With our collaborative partnerships, stakeholder relationships, and commitment to data driven processes, we keep our finger on the pulse of both public health practice and academia. The CPH exam goes through rigorous exam review process annually to ensure the content continues to align with CEPH foundational competences and the real-world practice of public health.

With a focus on excellence and a resolve to professionalize the field of public health, NBPHE provides a rigorous exam that reflects academic and practice-based public health and fosters life-long learning. We believe our public health certification programs provide the foundational step in professionalizing a field rich with diversity but unparalleled with passion. And, as we move forward in the next five years, we are focused on harnessing that passion and developing communities of practice, where public health professionals can come together to grow, share, and learn. We will build partnerships, strengthen our practices, and will lead the charge to assure excellence in public health.

The Certified in Public Health (CPH) is the mark of a public health professional. CPH demonstrates an individual's knowledge of key public health sciences. CPH distinguishes those that carry the mark by showing employers the candidate can meet and maintain a national standard in public health through continuing education focused on emerging and established public health issues.



# MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

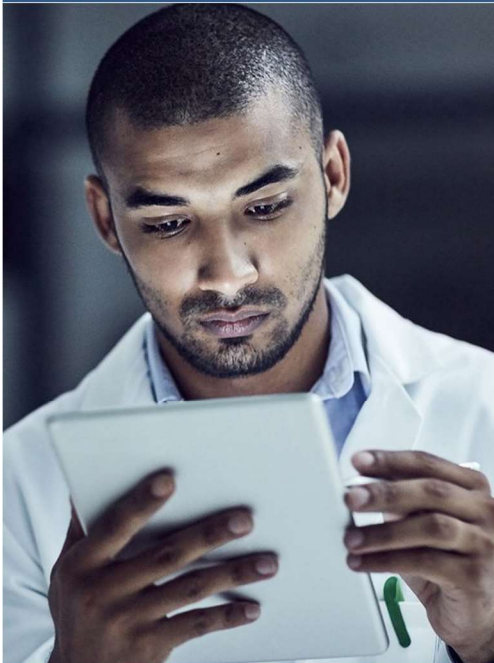
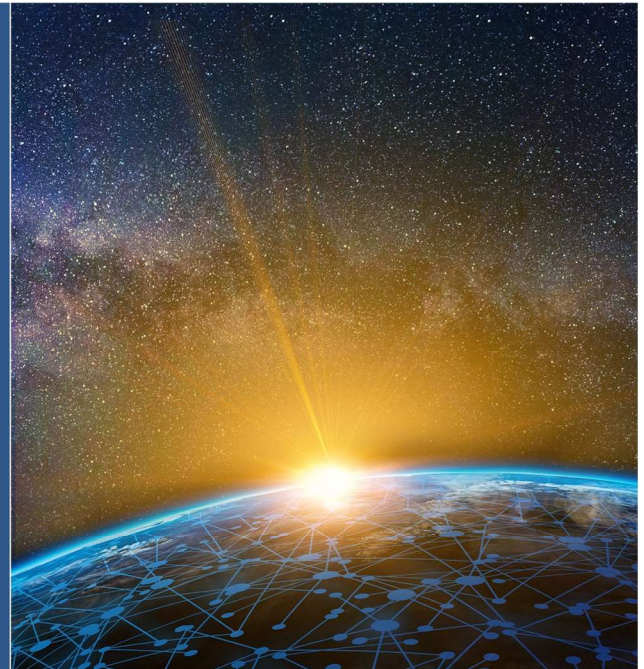
The National Board of Public Health Examiners is dedicated to assuring excellence in public health. Our mission, vision, values, and goals inform all that we do and have guided the development of this strategic plan.

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## Our Mission

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The mission of NBPHE is to ensure that public health professionals have mastered and continue to advance their knowledge and skills to meet the changing public health environment.



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## Our Vision

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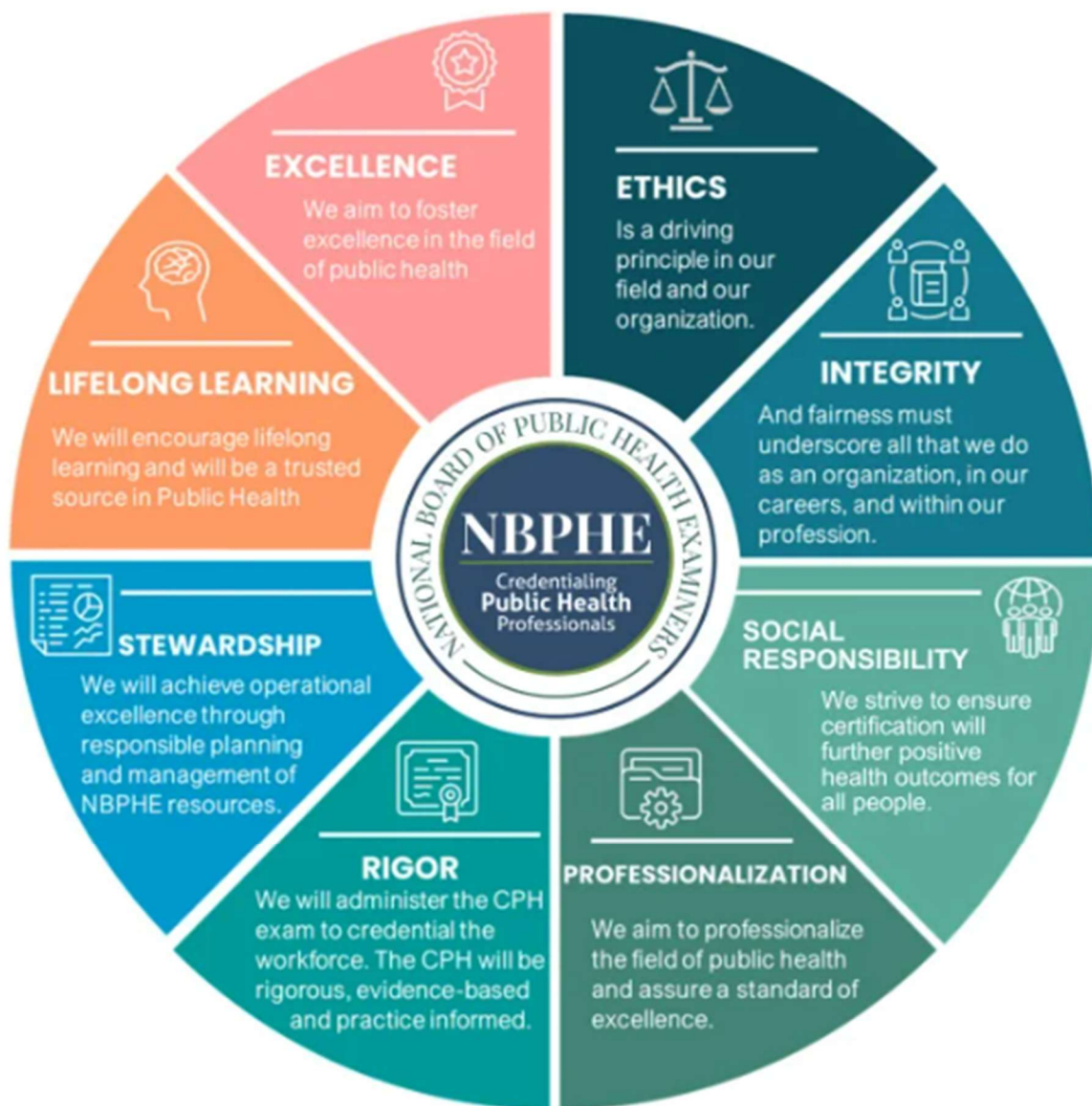
To be recognized as the standard of excellence for public health professionals.



# OUR CORE VALUES

The core values of NBPHE drive the action and focus of our organization. These values inform the decisions of our leadership and are embodied by our membership. NBPHE's core values are reflected in our mission and vision and are operationalized through our strategic efforts.

NBPHE is committed to eight core values:



# GOALS & OBJECTIVES

## Goal 1. Professionalize the Field of Public Health

To assure excellence in public health, NBPHE will lead the way in the professionalization of the field of public health through the certification and recertification of the public health workforce, while fostering a commitment to life-long learning.



NBPHE has certified over 13,000 members of the public health workforce.

### Objectives & Measures of Success

#### 1. Certified public health practitioners

Vital to the professionalization of the field, and therefore the growth of NBPHE, is a focus on increasing the number of eligible individuals who hold an NBPHE certification.

**20,000 public health practitioners will be Certified by the NBPHE.**

#### Action Steps:

- Increase marketing and visibility.
  - Target: leaders in public health, practitioners, students/graduates, and faculty.
  - Underscore the value of certification
- Expand outreach and partnerships.
- Enhance visibility through presence at state, regional, and national association meetings.
- Develop a campaign around the value added of being part of the Certified Community.

#### 2. Active certification

To build a community of public health professionals – trained and certified in public health – it is essential that individuals who get certified stay certified.

**The number of public health practitioners that are active will continue to increase.**

#### Action Steps:

- Work with certificants to understand barriers to recertification.
- Promote recertification opportunities
- Increase awareness that the recertification process focuses on professional development (as opposed to being limited to traditional continuing education.)

### 3. Schools & Programs of Public Health Require the CPH Exam

To professionalize the field and assure excellence, we must partner with the institutions who train the next generation of public health practitioner. Encouraging schools and programs of public health to require the CPH will increase recognition of the value of CPH, will provide a benchmark for employers, and ensures leveling across programs.

“The CPH credential is a democratizing force as it professionalizes the field of public health. Recognizing that public health expertise can be obtained both within and outside of formal training in schools and programs of public health, the certification provides a standard of excellence accessible to all who are part of our vast public health workforce.”  
- NBPHE board member

**The number of schools and programs that require the CPH will double.**

#### Action Steps:

- Analyze and disseminate NBPHE data.
- Develop a strategic outreach and communication plan to highlight the value of CPH and to spotlight schools and programs that require CPH.
- Work with CEPH board of directors to encourage greater use of CPH in meeting accreditation requirements.



#### 4. CPH Listed as Preferred in Job Opportunities

To improve demand for the public health certifications, employers must recognize the value. The increasing number of public health professional with an NBPHE certification and the increasing number of schools and programs which require the exam go hand-in-hand towards making the CPH a valuable tool employers can use when hiring or making promotion decisions.

**The number of employment opportunities that prefer or require public health certifications will increase.**

##### Action Steps:

- Promote the value of certification to employers.
- Identify and increase the number of state, local, tribal and territorial health department leaders that have an NBPHE certification.
- Develop partnerships with health departments to encourage the use of certification for accreditation purposes.
- Create a subcommittee to assess job trends, determine baseline, and develop goals for increasing CPH and other NBPHE certifications as a job requirement.
- Assess employer needs and the role of NBPHE in providing solutions, services and/or resources.
- Develop a Community of Practice Partnerships for employers.



## Goal 2. Enhance Exam Quality and Rigor

Ensure exams are well-developed, competency based, rigorous exams that are reflective of the knowledge and skills required to excel in the practice of public health.



*NBPHE is committed to the development, implementation, and rigorous review of the exam. NBPHE is committed to ensuring an exam that is competency-based and reflective of both academic content and the practice and skills required of public health practitioners.*

## Objectives & Measures of Success

### 1. Rigorous, Competency-Based Exams

Certification exams are the mechanism through which NBPHE assures excellence and works to professionalize the field of public health. To do this well, our exams must be a rigorous competency-based exam.

**Continue to develop rigorous, competency-based exams that are reflective of the knowledge and skills required to excel in the practice of public health.**

#### Action Steps:

- Continue rigorous quality improvement activities, including exam construction and item-review sessions.
- Conduct Job Task Analysis to ensure exam continues to reflect the skills and duties of the public health workforce.
- Conduct Bias Analysis to eliminate disparities in test-taking populations.

### 2. NCCA Accreditation

The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) is an independent, non-governmental agency that sets the standard for professional certification programs. NCCA Accreditation illustrates NBPHE's commitment to quality. Achieving NCCA accreditation is an important long-term goal, which requires enhanced levels of compliance, sustainable funding stream, and strengthened documentation.

**Develop an action plan and monitor progress toward achieving NCCA Accreditation.**

#### Action Steps:

- Develop an Accreditation/Maintenance of Accreditation Action Plan.
- Receive full NCCA Accreditation.

### 3. Enhance candidate experience

**Develop reliable tools candidates can use to improve their confidence in taking an NBPHE certification exam**

- Use evidence provided by tools such as post-exam surveys to improve processes based on candidate feedback

## Goal 3. Expand Marketing, Outreach and Partnerships

To create national and regional partnerships through enhanced marketing and outreach efforts to foster growth and development.

“The CPH can provide assurances for both the individual and the employer as it demonstrates a level of knowledge and competence attained.”

- Jaime Corvin, PhD, MSPH, CPH, Certification Committee Chair



““Making board certification in public health a preferred, and even required, qualification for our public health workforce will help us achieve better health for all.”

- David Buys, PhD, MSPH, CPH, NBPHE Chair-Elect

## Objectives & Measures of Success

### 1. Marketing, Communication & Outreach

A strong marketing, communication, and outreach plan are vital to drive partnership development, to encourage public health practitioners to become certified, and to expand employment opportunities for those who hold an NBPHE certification.

**Develop a robust marketing, communication, and outreach plan to foster growth and development. The plan will be implemented and evaluated annually.**

#### Action Steps:

- Use strong branding and language to ensure this language is meaningful and transferable. “National Board Exam” or “Board Certification” is language frequently used in other health sciences.

### 2. Partnerships

Data from key interest groups suggest those that are certified are committed and are some of the best supporters. Thus, building and leveraging partnerships can help the organization grow.

**The number of formal and informal partnerships will increase each year.**

#### Action Steps:

- Catalog existing partnerships and formalized relationships to document collaboration with current partners
- Develop an ambassador/champion program to expand partnerships.

## Goal 4. Maintain a robust, sustainable and adaptable organization

To be a sound steward of excellence in public health through a strong, sustainable, and adaptable business model.



Insights for future growth were derived from stakeholder interviews, including the need to:

1. elevate the CPH
2. convey the importance of certification to employers
3. strengthen outreach efforts
4. build communities of practice
5. build stronger partnerships with the NBPHE board.

## Objectives & Measures of Success

### 1. Operational Financial Stability

An important consideration for NBPHE is to ensure a strong and sustainable financial base.

**Perform regular process and quality improvement reviews.**

#### Action Steps:

- Design and implement a strategic and transparent budget model.
- Establish action plans to achieve financial stability.
- Streamline processes for effective implementation of NBPHE's strategic mission and to ensure a strong organizational structure.
- Develop a plan to hire staff for outreach, communication, and develop the certification community.
- Discuss succession planning.

### 2. Explore new certification exams

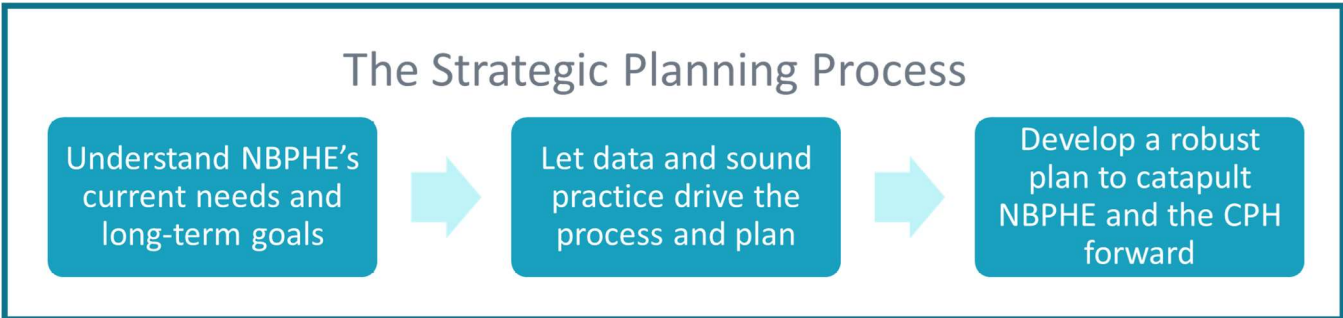
- Explore the feasibility and value of new certification programs
- Develop additional offerings to enhance certification programs such as digital badges and certificates

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The 2022-2027 NBPHE Strategic Planning Process was a collaborative effort involving critical stakeholders in all aspects of the process. To ensure a data driven process, NBPHE employed a multi-phase data collection process to understand the needs and perceptions of critical stakeholders. The following process was applied.

<b>Step 1</b>	Environmental Scan and Survey was conducted with NBPHE Board members (n=8) and CPH Professionals (n=239).
<b>Step 2</b>	In-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (n=17) from three primary sectors: a) academic, b) public health practice/private, and c) government.
<b>Step 3</b>	Strategic Planning Workshop with Executive Committee to report key findings and discuss future steps.
<b>Step 4</b>	Analysis of data, including SWOT analysis
<b>Step 5</b>	Strategic Planning Workshop with Board. A data drive approach was used to guide the visioning process.
<b>Step 6</b>	Strategic Planning Workshop with Board to develop mission and vision statements.
<b>Step 7</b>	Strategic Planning Workshop with Board to develop goals and objectives.
<b>Step 8</b>	Review, final comment, and adoption of final strategic plan

The outlined efforts and the impressive collaboration and input from our stakeholders resulted in the development of our strategic goals. These goals embody our core values and align with our mission, vision, and strategic direction. Taken together, each element of our data informed strategic plan, **Assuring Excellence in Public Health**, reflects our unwavering commitment to public health.





# SPECIAL THANK YOU TO...

Ericka Thomas, DrPH for her role in conducting the initial research that was the basis for the plan. Your organization and practical skills set us up for success.

Jaime A. Corvin, PhD, MSPH, CPH, for leading the process of consensus building, goal-setting and putting our ideas into form on paper. Your creativity, enthusiasm and initiative made this process a worthwhile endeavor.

A special thanks to over 200 members of the public health community who participated in focused interviews and surveys. Your input was invaluable in helping us to craft a vision of where the NBPHE should be going.

Finally, we would like to recognize the role of the board of directors for reviewing many iterations of this plan. You thoughtfully created goals which are both exciting yet feasible and will serve as a guiding light over the next five years.