

Draft Position Statement: Educating the Public Health Workforce

November 2022

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Background

The Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) is the peak organisation that works to advance public health education and research and leads and represents public health in universities throughout the Australasian region. Across our 39 member institutions, we represent thousands of public health educators, researchers, workforce developers and students.

The [CAPHIA Competencies](#) [1] outline the knowledge, skills and capabilities specified for public health graduates at each level of tertiary education. These inform university public health curricula and also programs such as the Public Health Officer Training Program and Public Health Medicine.

Our mission is to establish the highest academic standards in public health education and research, act as a respected voice for academic public health, and advocate for the development of public health professionals and researchers who are being educated or practising within Australasia [2].

Document Purpose

The primary intent of this Position Statement is to articulate member views on principles for educating the Public Health workforce.

The principles articulate:

1. The scope of public health and the diversity of public health professionals
2. CAPHIA's role in public health education across Australasia
3. Considerations when developing public health education
4. The connection between education and the public health workforce
5. The reasoning for high quality, structured education for the public health workforce.

Definitions and Considerations

For the purposes of this Position Statement, we use the term 'education' to include the spectrum including workplace-based training, micro-credentials, short courses, undergraduate and

postgraduate programs. CAPHIA members provide a range of public health education, which is summarised in the [CAPHIA Public Health Course Directory](#) [3].

For this Position Statement, CAPHIA adopts the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) definition of public health:

An organized activity of society to promote, protect, improve, and – when necessary – restore the health of individuals, specified groups, or the entire population. It is a combination of sciences, skills and values that function through collective societal activities and involve programmes, services and institutions aimed at protecting and improving the health of all people.” [4, p.27]

The application and practice of public health involves undertaking activities to strengthen public health capacities, programs and services, building awareness and modifying the environment for the benefit of the public.

Educating the Public Health Workforce: CAPHIA Statements and Principles

The following statements and principles in relation to educating the public health workforce are supported by CAPHIA.

Public Health Scope

1. Public health is a broad-ranging speciality that benefits from diversity in skills, background and perspectives to better reflect and serve populations and communities [5].
2. Public health professionals come from a variety of backgrounds including, but not limited to:
 - clinicians and practitioners such as nurses, doctors and dietitians
 - educators, researchers and evaluators
 - epidemiologists and biostatisticians
 - policy writers and program designers
 - lawyers, ethicists, urban planners and engineers
 - health and community workers, managers and leaders.
3. The practise of public health occurs in many local, national and international settings including, but not limited to:
 - academic institutions such as universities and research institutions
 - non-profit/for-benefit organisations targeting health improvements in specific communities,
 - non-profit/for-benefit organisations targeting improvement in specific health conditions or diseases,
 - social justice and welfare organisations,

- government bodies developing and implementing public health policies, programs and other initiatives for their constituents.

Education Standards

4. Universities are considered to be the primary education bodies for public health professionals.
5. While a Master of Public Health degree or equivalent qualification has traditionally been viewed as the 'gold standard' qualification for public health professionals in Australasia, those with an equivalent combination of qualifications and/or experience have increasingly been working in public health.
6. In recent years, universities have been increasingly educating students in public health through Bachelor-level degree programs.
7. In recent years, public health content has been increasingly included in curricula across university degrees.
8. The CAPHIA competencies [2] have been developed to support member institutions to achieve the expected education standard with sufficient peer review, community consultation and academic rigour.

Education

9. Public health education continually evolves to equip the public health workforce with contemporary, evidence-informed knowledge and skills.
10. Public health policy and practice should be informed by contemporary knowledge, translation of research and ongoing skill development [6].
11. Public health policy and practice can improve population level health outcomes. However, it can also cause harm. Continuing education, evaluation and diverse work experience in public health settings can minimise unintentional harm caused by poorly applied public health practices.
12. Ongoing professional development is critical to ensure that the workforce receives appropriate up-to-date training. [7]
13. Upskilling, reskilling and professional development is encouraged for all public health professionals, including those without specific public health qualifications.
14. Continuing education allows for the application of the CAPHIA Competencies, thus maintaining the highest standards and reducing potential harm in policy or practice.

Workforce

15. A highly educated, appropriately-resourced workforce optimises development and delivery of good public health policy, interventions and practice.
16. Encouragement of continuous learning ensures existing public health professionals can make contemporary, evidence-informed decisions that, in turn, ensure a responsive connection to, and reflection of, workforce needs.
17. Local, national and international governmental decision makers would also benefit from basic Public Health knowledge to better serve their communities and inform workforce planning [6].
18. Global leaders' aim for a public health workforce that is well-prepared, well-resourced, responsive, appropriately governed, scalable, interdisciplinary and collaborative. To achieve this desired future public health workforce, translation of practical learning and professional development is required. Academic public health institutions have substantial expertise and experience in delivering the education and capacity-building required to create the desired future public health workforce [6].

References:

1. Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) 2016, *Foundation Competencies for Public Health Graduates in Australia*, 2nd Ed., Canberra, ACT.
2. Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) 2022, Constitution, viewed 01 November 2022, <<https://caphia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CAPHIA-Constitution-May-2022.pdf>>
3. Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) 2022, *Open Access Public Health Course Directory_September2022*, viewed 27 Oct 2022, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SOtIVNjAJ9_bnV2Hq8py7iuoQjvOKgezRLfze7E1N9E/edit#gid=1578331462>
4. World Health Organization (WHO) 2021, *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021*, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO, World Health Organization, Geneva.
5. Watts RD, Bowles DC, Fisher C & Li IW 2021, 'The growth of Australian public health graduates and courses, 2001-2018: implications for education and employment

opportunities,' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 2021, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 95-100. DOI:10.1111/1753-6405.13076

6. Global Network for Academic Public Health 2021, 'Global governance for improved human, animal, and planetary health: the essential role of schools and programs of public health', viewed November 14 2022, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ASPPH_Media_Files/Docs/GNAPH_Global+governance+for+health.pdf>
7. Gurnett T, Prokopovich K, Ivers R, Cullerton K, Stekelenburg N and Slevin T 2022, 'Letter to the Editor: Government support and commitment to university-level public health education, research and workforce development is critical,' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 417-18. DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.13244