

Strengthening Public Health through Education and Training

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Every country in the world needs an accessible, effective and affordable system of personal health services. Competent organisations must offer preventive, curative and rehabilitative services of an appropriate quality and meet the needs of the population for social and nursing care whenever sufficient family or social resources are lacking.

To provide high-quality personal health services requires a well functioning system of public health. There is some indication that health care systems lacking essential public health functions fail to provide sufficiently effective curative and rehabilitative services as well as sufficiently effective preventive and promotive services. As a result such systems may at the same time under-, over- or mis-treat larger segments of the population. One of the challenges of most countries is to strengthen the essential public health function in a sustainable way.

What are the essential public health functions?

A large Australian Delphi study involving many international experts (<http://apha.cortex.com/apha/>) identified ten essential public health functions:

- Monitor the health status of the population.
- Investigate health problems in the community.
- Inform, educate and empower stakeholders.
- Forge community partnerships.
- Develop health policy and support planning.
- Enforce health code and regulations.
- Link people to appropriate health resources.
- Evaluate the quality and effectiveness of efforts.
- Assure a competent public health workforce.
- Support public health research and innovation.

Many European countries have started to modernise their public health systems. Member countries of the European Union were successful to set up modern education and training programmes in public health. In these countries a growing number of competent public health professionals and managers will help to strengthen essential public health functions. They will support scientific research and education, broaden the information and knowledge base and develop the competence of stakeholders. And they will improve the overall conditions for planning policies and programmes, for evidence-based actions and quality development, for need-oriented and efficient health care and health promotion efforts.

What are the aims of public health education and training?

Postgraduate education and training in public health will enable medical doctors, qualified professional nurses, social scientists and other groups to qualify for expert or leadership roles in a variety of fields: for policy planning and innovation, health care management and health promotion management, for scientific research, education and training, and evaluation. Depending on the field of the public health sector, professional experts and leaders will need a specific combination of the following competencies:

- **Self-competence** (e.g. self-assurance, reflectiveness, appropriate coping skills);
- **Social competence** (e.g. communication skills, mediating skills, skills for conflict resolution);

- **Strategic competence** (e.g. problem-solving skills, management skills, ability to engage in life-long independent learning);
- **Scientific competence** both in the **population and social health sciences** (epidemiology, health sociology, health economics, health law and health psychology etc.) and in the **organisational and management sciences** (sociology of organisations, management theory, health systems research, health and patient management, health policy and planning, health care financing and controlling).

For those considering a career in the field of public health, a number of choices are available today. They may apply for postgraduate education and training programme in one of the Schools of Public Health in the United States, the United Kingdom, in some other English-speaking country or at a German or Swiss University. Most students finish with a Master's degree (*Master of Public Health/M.P.H. or Master of Science/M.Sc.*). Some students enter a Doctoral programme and earn the degree of *Philosophical Doctor/Ph.D.* Those interested to get some training in a particular field of public health may choose a short programme or a course, for example in one of the many summer schools.