

# BUILDING THE FUTURE ONE HEALTH WORKFORCE

By: Mary Codd\*, George Valiotis, Nadav Davidovitch\*, Polychronis Kostoulas\*, Oliver Razum\*, Mzwandile Mabhala\*, Lore Leighton, Robert Otok and Carlo Signorelli\*

## > #EPH2023 – PLENARY 3:

Building the future One Health workforce

**Mary Codd** is Associate Dean of Public Health; Associate Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics; Programme Director MPH; School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science, University College Dublin, Ireland; **George Valiotis** is Executive Director, European Health Management Association (EHMA), Brussels, Belgium; **Nadav Davidovitch** is Professor of Epidemiology, Public Health Physician and Director, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Sheva, Israel; **Polychronis Kostoulas** is Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, Department of Public and One Health, School of Health Sciences, University of Thessaly, Karditsa, Greece; **Oliver Razum** is Professor and Dean, School of Public Health, Bielefeld University, Bielefeld, Germany; **Mzwandile Mabhala** is Professor in Public Health Epidemiology, Faculty of Health and Social Care, University of Chester, Chester, United Kingdom; **Lore Leighton** is Project Manager and **Robert Otok** is Director, ASPHER Secretariat, Brussels Belgium; **Carlo Signorelli** is Professor of Hygiene & Public Health and Director, School of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, University Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Milano, Italy and President of ASPHER. Email: [mary.codd@ucd.ie](mailto:mary.codd@ucd.ie)

**Summary:** A ‘new normal’ in public health and healthcare has arisen with socioeconomic shifts, technological developments, political strife, climate change, environmental degradation, and COVID-19. Challenges cannot be solved by one discipline or profession alone, but requires multiple sectors coming together, combining knowledge, expertise and methods. One Health is an integrated epidemiological and economic approach aiming to sustainably optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystem. This article reflects on the roles of Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) and European Health Management Association (EHMA) and the concrete steps needed to address skills for One Health.

**Keywords:** *One Health, Workforce, Capacity Building, ASPHER, EHMA*

## Introduction

An increasingly recognised phenomenon in public health and healthcare is that of a ‘new normal’ which has been and will continue to be shaped by demographic and socioeconomic shifts, scientific and technological developments, political strife, upheaval and migration, climate change and environmental degradation, natural disasters, food and water insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Although these major global challenges constitute a continuous state of risk, necessitating a state of ‘preparedness’ for change which cannot be fully contained or overcome, they call for recognition and regulation.<sup>2</sup> In turn this ‘new normal’ must shape our thinking and actions in relation to the scope and remit of our public health and healthcare workforces, with specific attention to the skills, competencies, and levels of preparedness in this constant state of change.

This ‘new normal’ does not discard the traditional tenets of public health and healthcare. However, it must extend its brief to incorporate the digital transformation of society and how this impacts on health; capitalise on big data and artificial intelligence (AI); adapt to diversity and intersectionality; cater for the needs of vulnerable groups; recognise the political and commercial influences on public health; and foster leadership and decision-making. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach to the public health challenges of our time is necessary.

## An interdisciplinary approach

The public health and healthcare workforces constitute heterogeneous groups from diverse professional backgrounds who are involved in protecting and promoting the health of populations.<sup>3</sup> As contexts and complexity increase, it is imperative to address the

readiness of the public health workforces locally, nationally, and globally to manage current challenges and to anticipate and prepare for future challenges. Current and future public health challenges cannot be solved by one discipline or profession alone, but require multiple sectors, disciplines, and professions to work together, exchanging and combining their knowledge, expertise, and methods.<sup>4</sup>

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The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) recognises the challenges posed by the ‘new normal’ for public health education, training and practice. Adhering to its mission to *“improve and protect the public by strengthening the education and training of public health professionals for practice and research”* ASPHER, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, has undertaken to investigate public health curricula and consider how best to address the competencies required and expected of current and future public health professionals. Inherent in ASPHER’s approach is the need to prepare a multidisciplinary workforce to work in interprofessional and cross-sectoral contexts recognising the skills, values, languages and methodologies of other disciplines.<sup>5</sup> One Health is one such context.

### One Health: Concept and Approach

Although the term ‘One Health’ is recent, the concept has been recognised for centuries. In the 1800s, scientists noted similarities in disease processes in animals and humans, but human and animal medicine were practiced separately until the 20th century. Recently, the One Health concept has gained more recognition in public health and animal

health communities.<sup>6</sup> Recognising that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment, One Health is an integrated epidemiological and economic approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimise the health of people, animals, and ecosystem.<sup>7</sup> The concept of One Health was developed to approach the complex interconnectedness and interdependence of all living species and the environment, thereby having a multiplicative positive effect in public health control efforts.<sup>8</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the vulnerability of human populations globally to emerging infectious diseases. Increasing impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have stimulated interest in institutionalising a One Health approach to contribute to global health security. One Health frameworks reject a reductionist view of health as a solely biomedical phenomenon, rather requiring closer cooperation between the human, animal, and environmental health sciences, contextualised politically, historically, and geographically for the health of the biosphere, as well as the importance of dismantling disciplinary and professional silos.<sup>9</sup>

Suitable capacity building with training in One Health must be integrated into the public health and health workforces. Plenary session 3 of the EUPHA conference brings together ASPHER and the European Health Management Association (EHMA), two key organisations mandated to sustain and enhance capacity building for public health and healthcare workforces in Europe, to reflect on the roles they play and the concrete steps being taken to address training and skills for One Health.

### Action by ASPHER

A multidisciplinary approach in public health, is recognised as fundamental by ASPHER. This was reaffirmed at the Association’s 50th anniversary<sup>10</sup> and a cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary approach has been confirmed through ASPHER’s collaborative work with WHO to professionalise the public health workforce in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

A 2021 survey to profile public health education and training offers of ASPHER member schools and institutions found One Health to be a key emerging interest of several members. Many members already function within a multidisciplinary context in teaching, research and other activities and are actively seeking to increase cooperation across disciplines. In some cases, this is strategic positioning of programmes within university structures, in faculties of psychology, applied sciences or social sciences. In others, relationships are forged with faculties of agriculture and veterinary medicine, or ecology and environmental sciences departments.

### The ASPHER Core Curriculum Programme (CCP)

An important role of academic public health institutions is to serve local, national, and global communities, from educating the public, politicians and the media about important public health issues to collaborating with health departments on just-in-time trainings to providing expert guidance for decision-makers in government, non-profit, and for-profit sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic has put public health professionals in the public leadership spotlight, demonstrating the need to develop skills beyond the traditional public health education domains of epidemiology, biostatistics, health promotion, health policy, programme evaluation to be most effective in responding to crises.<sup>12</sup>

To respond to the needs of members, and increasing evidence for an interdisciplinary approach to public health, ASPHER in collaboration with WHO Regional Office for Europe has undertaken a wide-ranging review of public health curricula across member schools, in consultation with both established public health experts and early career professionals as a necessary step to a prepared public health workforce, and to ensure that ASPHER-member public health programmes are fit-for-purpose. One Health is a key subject area within this curriculum.

The Core Curriculum Programme (CCP) has established that One Health content in schools in which it is delivered falls

into five major themes: Human health; Animal health; Plant and food health; Climate health; and Practice. The detailed elements of each theme demonstrate a diversity of content spanning professionals from all relevant specialisms. Amongst schools that do not currently provide One Health content, almost 90% agreed that it was important to integrate these five thematic areas into public health curricula. Challenges include:

- sharing of content of current and future One Health curricula with schools and programmes who are constrained in the provision of this content; and
- integration into current One Health curricula of cross-cutting and interdisciplinary skills of digital literacy, communication, emergency preparedness, leadership, advocacy and ethics in practice.

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upskilling and  
reskilling the  
European  
healthcare  
workforce

### Action by EHMA

EHMA serves as a membership organisation open to organisations committed to improving health and healthcare. It focuses its actions on health management capacity and capabilities in support of the implementation of health policy and practice. EHMA fosters an environment where evidence, challenge and experience are valued, and promotes complex debates on current topics such as One Health and the integration of concepts into the operations of the health workforce and stakeholders so as to better serve the health of patients and the environment in which they live.

In order to ensure the European health workforce is able to cope with future challenges and evolving societal expectations,<sup>10</sup> EHMA is coordinating

### Box 1: The BeWell partnership

Comprising 24 organisations from 11 European countries, BeWell promotes the sustainable transformation of European health systems through four primary actions:

- Developing skills intelligence on the digital and green skills needs of the health workforce;
- Establishing the first Blueprint Alliance for the health ecosystem to create a skills strategy to implement at a local, regional, national and European levels;
- Launching a large-scale skills partnership under the Pact for Skills initiative;
- Conceiving and implementing a training programme on digital and green skills in the healthcare sector and for emerging occupational profiles.

BeWell is cross-collaborative aiming to advocate and provide a roadmap to lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD) upskilling and reskilling the European healthcare workforce across professions in green and digital skills. It takes health and care system needs into context – integrating critical areas such as One Health – for pandemic recovery and preparedness for future emergencies.

It calls upon policymakers to integrate the health and care workforce's needs – co-creating the design and implementation of policies.

the BeWell project – Blueprint Alliance for a Future Health Workforce Strategy on Digital and Green Skills – In partnership with education and training providers and in consultation with diverse stakeholders. BeWell strategises on upskilling and reskilling the European healthcare workforce across professions in green and digital skills (see Box 1) to cope with future challenges and evolving societal expectations.<sup>11</sup> One Health is key to inform green skills and must be a recognised component integrated into digital skills.

The first version of BeWell's Skills Strategy launched on 7 June 2023, during the EHMA2023 conference.<sup>12</sup> It emphasises development of training and CPD for lifelong learning in digital skills (e-health, big data and AI); green literacy and competencies incorporating climate change, sustainability and green logistics; but also soft-skills to work in multidisciplinary and multiprofessional collaboration critical for One Health principles. The Strategy acts as a roadmap to implementing actions at the local, national and European levels.

### Conclusion

Working together, ASPHER and EHMA can advance the interdisciplinary agenda of public health and healthcare education, training, and practice as well as the preparedness of the public health and healthcare workforces. COVID-19 and other crises ushered in a 'new normal' as it relates to public health practice. It is incumbent upon us to evolve our educational programmes and CPD for current and future public health and healthcare professionals accordingly. Integrating concepts such as One Health into public health and healthcare curricula and lifelong learning is essential to equip graduates and upskill professionals to effectively navigate strategies and interventions in response to health crises in an ever-changing world, thereby protecting and promoting the health and welfare of the global population and planet.

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## Making Health for All Policies: Harnessing the co-benefits of health

**By:** Greer SL, Falkenbach M, Siciliani L, McKee M, Wismar M, Vissapragada P, Montás MC, Perroud J, Rockwell O, Figueras J

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This policy brief argues for health actors to adopt a “Health for All Policies” (HfAP) approach that focuses on co-benefits between sectors. HfAP offers an alternative approach to “Health in All Policies” (HiAP), which primarily focused on health sector gains and often failed to engage other sectors. HfAP recognizes the wide-ranging effects of health and health policy on societies, extending beyond the realm of good health. It emphasizes co-benefits, where health policies and actions

produce positive outcomes that span multiple sectors and can contribute to meeting many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

By using the SDGs as a framework, the brief identifies goals that can be pursued across sectors. This includes the impact of improved health status on other SDGs – for example, better health can lead to better educational and employment outcomes – as well as the impact of health systems and policies on other sectors, such as through being a major

employer and driver of economic activity. The logic of Health for All Policies amounts to making a case for investment in health, but also for the health sector itself to do better in understanding and directing its impact on the world beyond the healthcare it provides.

