

## Developing a new generation of public health leaders

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One of the challenges of teaching and developing the new generation of public health leaders is to meet the needs of health systems in the twenty-first century. Competent leaders are increasingly important across all health professions and “as a learned skill; the topic of leadership is gathering momentum as a key curriculum area” (1). Effective leadership is a complex and highly valued component of public health education. It consists of a learnable set of competencies that can be developed by fostering interdisciplinary, collaborative learning and communication around current and urgent public health problems such as for example: antimicrobial resistance, climate change, diversity and inclusion, health inequalities or communicable and non-communicable diseases, or conflict. Learning how to advance existing health policies, which are not effective or proposing new ones in a facilitated group setting, can assist students in leadership development and can be viewed as a practical technique for orchestrating change and achieving performance in the practitioner’s world (2). Public Health Leadership course, which is a part of the Governance and Leadership in European Public Health Master’s at Maastricht University instils a competency of political savvy in the future public health professionals, who have to propose a plan for policy change or policy development in relation to a specific public health challenge in the process of six leadership tutorials. The result of such collaborative process facilitated by public health or leadership experts is a collection of Policy Briefs that we present in this Special Issue. These Policy Briefs developed by the public health students contribute to both the development of new generation of public health leaders with a policy-making acumen and to the development of public health policy field from the perspective of young generation of public health professionals. The importance of this work is summarised below by some of the expert

tutors who took part in this educational experience.

“The field urgently needs public health practitioners who understand how to look at big, complex problems, dissect and analyse them, and craft creative, evidence-based ideas about how to solve them with better policies. It's an essential skill in advancing change to improve the public's health." *Sue Babich*

"The policy brief on participation and awareness of climate change shows which issues are most important to tackle (climate change), what populations need extra attention in policies (citizens in cross-border regions are most often neglected) and which tools are necessary to ensure broad support and sustainable measures (by citizen participation). These are aspects that every public health leader should take into account when working towards health for all." *Rana Orhan*

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, harm reduction services appeared as front-line public health interventions that quickly adapted and innovated to respond to the needs of those already stigmatised and criminalised by their drug use behaviour, but also to provide basic care to vulnerable populations including migrants, homeless and impoverished people. As the war on Ukraine recently showed, beyond the prevention of fatal overdoses and blood-borne diseases such as HIV/HCV among people who use drugs through the provision of Opioid Substitution Treatment and Needle & Syringe exchange, harm reduction services may also play a role in providing antiretroviral therapy and other life-saving medication to solve health issues affecting refugees. Therefore, this policy brief explains the importance of harm reduction services in engaging the most vulnerable populations in society, while highlighting why they are essential public health services that must be recognised and protected by governments and policymakers, especially in current times of crisis." *Jessica Neicun*.

"The European Region was on track to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) epidemics by 2030, which is one of the targets developed by the United Nations in Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resources intended for TB have shifted away. Additionally, the WHO TB Action Plan for the European Region 2016-2020 needs to be updated and a new Action Plan should be developed. This policy brief explores how the WHO TB Action Plan should be updated, taking into consideration lessons learned from the pandemic." *Martina Paric.*

## References

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2. Yphantides N, Escoboza S and Macchione N (2015) Leadership in public health: new competencies for the future. Front. Public Health 3:24.

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