NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?
WHAT CAN THEY DO?
HOW CAN THEY BE FORMED?
HOW CAN THEIR IMPACT BE STRENGTHENED?

Introduction
More than sixty nations around the world currently have national public health associations. While most associations have been organized during the last few decades, some are more than a century old. The yearly establishment of new associations attests to the importance of their roles. To strengthen efforts for advancing the health of populations, a public health association should exist in every nation. Where an association already exists, its activities and impact can be broadened and reinforced.

In 1967, representatives from seven national associations founded the World federation of Public Health Associations to serve as an international non-governmental coalition of national public health associations. Two principal aims of the WFPHA are to assist in the formation of associations in countries where they do not yet exist and to help broaden and reinforce the activities of current associations. The WFPHA offers this booklet for those interested in organizing, developing, or improving an association of public health personnel. This booklet outlines the purpose and benefits of an association, explains possible strategies for forming such a group, and suggests several possible projects and programs for organized associations.

Purpose of a national Public Health Association
The combined forces of health personnel and interested citizens can contribute greatly the strengthening of organized health services in any country. The main purpose of a national public health association is to provide a powerful voice and organizational structure for the advancement of measures for the promotion of health, the prevention of disease, the care of sick, and the rehabilitation of the disabled. The association can present to government, professional, and other bodies the consensus of public health workers’ opinions on healthy policy matters. A national public health association can also serve to advance the professional position and interests of public health personnel.

Benefits of a national Public health Association
A national public health association can benefit both the general population and the members of the association in a number of ways.

- The exchange of information on all aspects of public health and the general strengthening of national health systems that a public health association facilitates can bring obvious benefits to the general population.
Regular meetings and other forms of communication help to keep personnel informed on new developments and new knowledge in the field.

- Special health benefits can come from communications among health personnel from different agencies, both public and private. Many problems in health systems arise from lack of coordination between agencies concerned with the same health problems or the same population group. The intermingling of these diverse health personnel is advantageous for all parties.

- The public visibility and general publicity of a national public health association can strengthen the entire national health system. Public health workers often fail to get the recognition accorded to associations of physicians, dentists, nurses, or pharmacists. By attracting greater attention to public health personnel, the association can enhance organized health activities for the general population.

- Participation in the activities of a public health association can improve the morale and dedication of all public health personnel. Day-to-day public health work often involves difficult and discouraging experiences. When a person finds others who have had similar experiences and can exchange views about them, the spirit and determination of all can be uplifted.

**Organizing a national Public Health Association**

The exact steps to be taken to establish a national public health association must, of course, depend on conditions and past events in each country. As a rough guide for actions that may be appropriate in most countries, some steps are given here.

1. Form an ad hoc (unofficial) organizing committee of five to ten individuals who are interested in founding a national public health association. This committee should meet several times to work out ideas. It may be advisable to choose a temporary chairperson.

2. Compile a list of persons in public health work and other persons strongly interested in health. It is important that these persons come from many places and many types of public and private organizations - not solely from the governmental health services. Public health is an interdisciplinary field, and its strength depends on the interaction and cooperation of persons from many backgrounds. All members should be enrolled as individuals, not as representatives of organizations. A person with a staff that can help with clerical activities (typing, mailing) should be included if possible.
3. Find a meeting place and set a date (well in advance) for an initial meeting of persons possibly interested in founding the association. Publicity is important and should be extensive as possible. Persons on the prospective member list should be contacted personally if possible, and meeting information should be widely disseminated among the public health community.

4. The initial meeting should be chaired by a temporary chairperson, and if it is well attended, actions may be taken to appoint and organize temporary committees for the following purposes: (a) nominations of principal officers (President, Vice-president, Secretary, and Treasurer); (b) constitution preparation; (c) membership enrollement; (d) dues and financing; (e) program and meetings. If the initial meeting is not well attended, a second meeting should be held before these five temporary committees are appointed.

The President or other members of the WFPHA may be able to attend such organizational meetings, helping to catalyze and stimulate development of the association.

5. After an adequate interval to allow all the committees to accomplish their assigned tasks, call another meeting, again with extensive publicity. This meeting can start out with the election of the officers. Nominations from the floors should be allowed. After officers are elected, each of the other four temporary committees can present their reports, followed by general discussion.

6. The elected president can the appoint officers and members of the five committees. These committees should be allowed time to finalize reports on the Constitution, strategies for enrolling members, dues and other methods of financing, and a program for the next and first official meeting. This meeting should be well publicized and held at a carefully chosen place. At this event, the association’s constitution should be adopted and plans made for all other policies and programs. Also at his meeting, a sixth committee should be appointed on publications.

7. By now the association is on its way, but keeps it moving a publication – if only a small newsletter- should be produced. In this publication, there should appear the constitution, the minutes of the first official meeting, one or two technical papers on timely subjects, and the plans for the next meetings. In general, maintaining regular contact with interested persons is a crucial link in the development process.

8. Depending on the size of the membership, the next meeting may include steps to form sub-units, sometimes called sections. In general, this would be justified only if more than 200 members attend meetings. If sections are formed to permit persons with common interests to work together, they should be based on fields of work (e.g. disease control, nutrition, environmental protection, hospitals and medical care, etc.) rather than on disciplines (physicians, nurses, technicians, etc.).
9. In planning the programs for subsequent meetings of the association, it is a good idea to invite prominent speakers to address timely health issues. Members of the association should have the opportunity to present papers on subjects approved by the program committee. Finally, every meeting should make allowance for an “administrative business session” to discuss topics concerning the organization of the association itself.

10. When the association becomes strong enough, funds may support a part-time or even full-time office secretary. This person may be employed most of his or her time in another health position inside or outside the government. The address of the office secretary may serve as the address of the association in its early years.

**Suggestions for Projects and Programs**

Once the organizational structure of the association has been established, projects and activities can be planned. At the early stages of an association’s development, resources will probably be limited; programs must be designed accordingly. Two of the most common and useful start-up activities are an annual meeting and a simple newsletter.

**Programming Events**

A great number of possibilities exist for programming events of interest to public health personnel. Some which historically have been successful include the following.

- Talks or presentations by outstanding or particularly interesting speakers
- Educational seminars for members and others interested in public health issues
- Presentations by members on subjects approved by the program committee

**Possible Projects**

A national public health association also has many options in considering what kinds of projects to undertake. Here are several suggestions.

- Preparation of health education materials for the general population
- Production of manuals or handbooks for health personnel (e.g., on aspects of primary health care, nutrition, environmental health)
- Dispatch of communications (e.g., on epidemic hazard) to all health personnel in the country
- Assistance in the recruitment and training of persons for service in the many disciplines involved in public health work
- Specific research projects, particularly at the request of governmental or other bodies
- Development of a library or clearinghouse of public health resource materials
- Development, through meetings, newsletters, and other measures, of effective communication and coordination among the many agencies and organizations concerned with health and medical care throughout the country.
• Continuing education courses for various types of health care personnel in both the public and private sector
• Publication of one or more journals in which public health personnel may report for wide audiences on current work and research
• Collaboration with the health personnel of other nations on public health matters that are not exclusively within the province of governments
• Improvement of the professional status of public health personnel through collective representation

The World Federation of Public Health Associations

The World Federation of Public Health Associations is an international non-governmental organization concerned with public health generally, at distinct from single disciplines or occupations. Its members are national public health associations whose own memberships include nurses, sanitarians, administrators, physicians, health educators, pharmacists and planners, in addition to lay persons interested in public health. The federation was founded in 1967 by a group of national associations from seven nations – India, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, the U.K., the U.S., and Venezuela. In 1970 the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the Federation and granted it official relation status. Subsequently the WFPHA has established official relations with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other international organizations.

Goals

The Federation has several goals:

• To facilitate collaborative efforts among member groups for improving health and health services
• To provide a medium through which national, non-governmental health organizations can work effectively with national and international health agencies to improve community health
• To encourage the formation of national public health associations
• To strengthen existing associations in their work of supporting the public health professions
• To exchange information among member associations

Activities

Since the inception in 1967, the Federation’s activities have included the following:

• International Congresses, convened every three years, where health experts from around the world gather to share ideas and experiences. A key feature of the Congresses is the Leavell Lecture – a memorial to Hugh Leavell, who took the lead in founding the WFPHA. The lectureship provides an opportunity to hear highly respected figures discuss development issues
• Annual meetings, held in Geneva each May during the World Health Assembly
World Federation of Public Health Associations
Fédération mondiale des associations de santé publique
Federación Mundial de Asociaciones de Salud Pública

- A quarterly newsletter which provides information on the activities of the WFPHA, its member groups, and the international organizations with which it has official relations. Occasional special studies and reports address key international health issues
- Collaborative field projects that strengthen the capacity of member associations to improve community health. The Federation also seeks to encourage partnerships among member associations to carry out the field projects

Membership Information

Full Membership is open to national public health associations that meet three criteria:
1. Multidisciplinary composition, as distinct from concern with a single occupation or specialty.
2. Status as a nongovernmental organization, although individual members may be government employees.
3. Recognition as the national public health association of the country, thereby representing all of its public health workers. Annual dues are US$100 base dues plus US$0.20 for industrialized countries and US$0.10 for other countries multiplied by the number of members in the association.

Regional Membership is open to federations of national public health associations and/or of schools of public health of a geographic region. Regional members promote the objectives of WFPHA within their region. Regional members pay no dues and are represented at meetings as observers.

Sustaining Membership is open to organizations and individuals that endorse the principles of WFPHA and desire to contribute financially to its support. Sustaining members may not hold office or vote on policy decisions. Annual dues are US$1,000.

Geneva Secretariat

World Federation of Public Health Associations
c/o
Institute for Social and Preventive Medicine (IMSP)
University of Geneva
CMU
1, rue Michel Servet
CH-1211 Genève 4
Switzerland
membership@wfpha.org