



## Pilot WA Public Health Officer Training Program (WAPHOTP) Communiqué 10 November 2022

### UPDATE

The WA Public Health Officers Training Program 2022 is clearly now on the homeward straight and Graduation is fast approaching scheduled for 23 November 2022.

For future information regarding the ongoing WAPHOTP please refer to the webpage at: [https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U\\_Z/WA-Public-Health-Officer-Training-Program](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/WA-Public-Health-Officer-Training-Program)

### WAPHOTP TRAINEE-LED EDUCATION SESSIONS 2022

The month of October flew by as the WA Public Health Office Training Program trainees prepared and launched into the trainee-led education sessions:

- 12 October: 'Mental Health – A Public Health Issue' presented by Cassandra MacArthur and Gracie Edwards
- 18 October: 'Neglected Tropical Diseases' presented by Joanne O'Dea
- 9 November: 'Foodborne Outbreak Activity' presented by Tracie Chong, Stacey Hong and Rashmi Rauniyar.

### HEALTH LEADER SPEAKER SERIES

At each session over the past six weeks, WAPHOTP trainees learn from, and are inspired by, Health Leader Speakers reflecting on their career journey throughout the healthcare system. Trainees have had the privilege of hearing the following health leaders:

- Dr Vinesh Gupta, Medical Co-Director, Mental Health Division, Royal Perth Bentley Group
- Dr Justin Wang, Medical Director, WA Tuberculosis Control Program & Consultant Physician, Respiratory Medicine, Royal Perth Hospital
- Dr Robyn Gibbs, former Manager Immunisation Program, Communicable Disease Control Directorate, Department of Health WA.

### WAPHOTP TRAINEE'S ADVENTURE



As part of the WAPHOTP 2022, **Rashmi Rauniyar** was very fortunate to be given an opportunity to take part in the Trachoma Screening program in the Midwest region of WA (29 August to 2 September 2022).

*'I did not have any experience in working in remote communities, so this placement was a great learning opportunity. My time was spent in the local regional communities, engaging with the community members, teachers and other health care workers enhanced my cultural understanding and knowledge of social and environmental health factors that underpin trachoma endemicity.'*



Photographs provided by the WA Country Health Service, with permission of patient's family

*Public Health Nurse Lyn Symonds and Aboriginal Health Worker Gloria Jones took me under their wing and shared their invaluable knowledge about the program, as well as the success stories and the barriers of the program.*

*I gained experience in working in partnership with local service providers and communities such as WA Country Health S Public and Community Health staff, local primary health care service providers, environmental health, Aboriginal Community Councils, and the local schools. A great collaboration of these various stakeholders, as well as the hard work on the ground is the tribute to the success of this program. My time here has taught me the adaptation of evidence based public health practice in remote and rural context.*

*These opportunities would not have been possible without my engagement with the WAPHOTP and the mentorship with Jo-Anne Morgan'.*

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WA ALL AGENCIES HEATWAVE EXERCISE

On 27 October 2022 the WAPHOTP trainees observed a heatwave desktop exercise. This provided the trainees with a first-hand experience of the health impacts of a heatwave, including the operational and logistical considerations that are set in place in such an event. WAPHOTP are grateful to have been part of this exercise.

## MEET THE TRAINEE / MEET THE MENTOR

Trainees continued to meet and work closely with their respective mentor, all of whom are highly skilled senior healthcare professionals throughout Australia. In this edition we meet trainees Stacey Hong and Rashmi Rauniyar and their respective mentors Lauren Bloomfield and Jo-Anne Morgan.



**Stacey Hong**  
OzFoodNet Epidemiology  
Communicable Disease  
Control Directorate  
Department of Health WA

For as long as I could remember, I have always loved science. However, a career path following a Bachelor of Science degree is often unclear. Before the end of my degree, I was persuaded by my university lecturers to commence an Honours degree and somehow fell into the research laboratory of Professor Thomas Riley.

I found the steep learning curve of being an independent scientist strangely rewarding. I subsequently continued working for Professor Riley as a research assistant, obsessing over the epidemiology and surveillance of *Clostridium difficile* and commenced my PhD journey in 2015.



**Lauren Bloomfield**  
Epidemiologist  
Communicable Disease  
Control Directorate  
Department of Health WA

I work part-time as an Epidemiologist in the Communicable Disease Control Directorate (WA Health) where I have been since 2011, and also part-time as a Senior Lecturer in Population and Preventive Health at the School of Medicine at the University of Notre Dame, Fremantle.

I have always been a 'public health person' since I started my undergraduate degree in Health Science back in 2002(!), and I really enjoy teaching epidemiology, critical appraisal and other important public health skills to future doctors.

As I was closing in on finalising my thesis, the COVID-19 global pandemic took flight and it has never been a more relevant time to be a microbiologist in infectious diseases. Whilst the pandemic caused havoc globally, I reflected that this is probably the only time where the entire global population would know what a virus is and what epidemiologists do! In 2020, I fortuitously joined the Public Health Intelligence team for COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Operations Centre. In 2021, I joined OzFoodNet and was exposed to the other side of public health outside of the laboratory. In these roles, I learnt outbreak management, public health response and innovative approaches in disease surveillance.

As a trainee in the 2022 WAPHOTP, I have embraced the wider scope of public health. I've found this experience to be incredibly enriching and have gained a better understanding of public health outside of communicable diseases. Through the program I have the privilege of meeting with Dr Lauren Bloomfield, who shared invaluable insights - both working in government and in academia (a career path I have always considered). Lauren is a pioneer for automation and have used innovative ways to answer epidemiological questions of public health importance. I value our catch ups as her suggestions are always outside the box and challenges me to think further. I believe public health requires a collaborative approach and I hope as more of us become advocates for public health through this program or others, we can achieve great health outcomes for all future generations!

I consider one of my most important roles as a public health advocate to teach other people to be able to access and interpret scientific studies - the COVID 'infodemic' has made this even more important as we find ourselves overwhelmed with studies.

Working in both government and academia allows a good mix of teaching and hands on public health work - it's often tricky juggling two jobs but I get a lot out of both of them.



I started as a mentor this year and have really enjoyed engaging with the program - it is a fantastic initiative and the last few years has shown us how important our public health workforce is!



**Rashmi Rauniyar,  
Epidemiologist, Public  
Health Intelligence, MCDC**

Originally from Nepal, I moved to Australia to complete my undergraduate degree in Health. I graduated as a Registered Nurse, subsequently specialising and working in critical care for almost a decade. My passion in advocating for my patients and their families, as well as empowering them about their health led me to complete a Master of Public Health (MPH) through UWA. I then worked in clinical research for a couple of years, before making the move to Public Health in early 2020.

I currently work as an Epidemiologist at Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control (MCDC) where I realised the power of automation and innovation in disease control and surveillance. This also led me to enrol in Postgraduate studies in Data Science.



**Jo-Anne Morgan,  
Program Manager  
Public Health,  
WA Country Health Service**

I currently work for the WA County Health Service (WACHS) as the Program Manager Public Health. This position enables me to provide program leadership and support to key Public Health program initiatives and staff across country WA. My main interest in public health is to work collaboratively to improve the health outcomes for the most vulnerable populations in Australia. Equity is one of the WACHS values and is always in the forefront of any business case, funding application or program I am involved with.

Delivering a Public Health program requires partnerships and collaboration within the public and private sector and in my current role I am lucky to do this every day.

Our Head of Department – Ben Scalley is very supportive of this area and I'm looking forward to exploring this space more.

Being a part of WAPHOTP 2022 has given me knowledge in the broader area of Public Health and helped me understand the roles of the various stakeholders, as well the importance of their engagement. This program has also contributed hugely in my understanding of cultural awareness and Aboriginal health.

I was lucky to be paired with Jo-Anne Morgan (Program Manager for WACHS) who has been instrumental in my professional growth. She has been very supportive of my learning goals. I hope she continues in the mentorship program so the future trainees can have similar experience to mine.

The variety of what I do is challenging but so rewarding. I love to celebrate the successes of my colleagues and offer support to listen when things are not going to plan. Together we make a better impact!

The challenges of recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff within Public Health is an area I am keen to continue to invest in and one of the main reasons I wanted to be a part of the Public Health Officer training program. This is my second time acting as a mentor in the program and I have thoroughly enjoyed my involvement. Engaging with the trainees has been a very rewarding experience for me. I would like to thank Rashmi for being a wonderful mentee who has always been engaged and eager for learning experiences that will continue to see her grow. I look forward to watching Rashmi progress in her Public Health career.



## ALUMNI – WHAT ARE THEY DOING NOW?

Rourke Jackson started in the health system as a Registered Nurse where he saw some patients falling through the cracks and not having their health issues fully addressed due to a range of factors.

*'This led me to study a Graduate Certificate in Public Health, and a Graduate Diploma in Health Promotion. My transition into a non-clinical role came when I started working in the State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) where*

*I was a part of the Health Operations team. In this role I oversaw the public COVID testing clinics and broader COVID testing, as well as writing and maintaining policy and guidelines relating to COVID Clinics and the care of COVID positive patients within hospital settings. While working in the SHICC, I completed the WA Public Health Officer Training Program (WAPHOTP) which provided me with a valuable set of skills to implement in my work. My mentor was a highlight for me where I was able to discuss my transition into public health and receive advice from outside of WA Health. Since completing the WAPHOTP, I have gained a permanent position in the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) in WA Health, where I am part of a team who coordinates and leads the system wide response on climate action and sustainability. I have also been successful in receiving a scholarship to study the Environmental Sustainability and Health care systems course run by Notre Dame University.'*

Rourke's journey into public health begun with him wanting to help people and make change and evolved from individual patient care to trying to make system wide changes. His advice to anyone wanting to pursue similar careers within public health would be to find an area they are passionate about, build professional relationships, and be willing to put yourself out there and take the leap into a new area.

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