

# **Public health dietitians and public health nutritionists work with groups and communities of people, rather than individuals.**

Dietitians and nutritionists work to make “healthy food choices the easy food choices”. This can involve them in everything from working with the media, to advising on food and nutrition guidelines, through to developing nutrition/exercise programmes for adults and children.

A key responsibility is to ensure that the public receives clear and consistent nutrition messages, rather than confused ‘latest fad’ ones.

## **ACTIVITIES PUBLIC HEALTH DIETITIANS AND NUTRITIONISTS MIGHT DO:**

- encourage school environments to support healthy and affordable food choices
- support a local marae by providing advice on healthy food options
- work with a local sports trust to evaluate a workplace nutrition/exercise programme
- develop a resource to educate communities on the fat content in key foods
- work with the food industry to change the composition of foods and to offer more healthy choices.

# Public Health Dietitian & Public Health Nutritionist

## **What school subjects do you need?**

Science subjects such as chemistry and biology are really important, as are mathematics and English. You might also be interested in food and technology.

## **What qualifications will you need?**

You will need either a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Consumer and Applied Sciences majoring in Human Nutrition (including food service management). You need to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics to be a registered dietitian.

To be a registered nutritionist, you need to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Science (community nutrition) as well as an appropriate undergraduate degree, relevant work experience and professional development.

Most public health dietitians and nutritionists then complete a specific qualification in public health.

## **Who employs public health dietitians/nutritionists?**

District health boards, the Ministry of Health or non-government organisations like the Heart Foundation, Cancer Society and iwi providers employ public health dietitians and nutritionists. Nutrition is at the heart of many public health issues, so public health dietitians and nutritionists are likely to be in demand in the foreseeable future.

## CAREER 4:

# PUBLIC HEALTH DIETITIAN

### **NICKY, Community and Public Health, Canterbury District Health Board**

AS A DIETITIAN WORKING IN A PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT, NICKY MCCARTHY USES her knowledge of nutrition to help prevent diseases like obesity and type 2 diabetes. She works closely with related organisations including the Heart Foundation, Cancer Society, public health nurses, health promoters, primary health organisations and community health workers.

Nicky's interest in food and health helped her decide to become a dietitian. Her work includes providing up to date and accurate nutrition information to the community, by offering nutrition training for health professionals and community workers, and working with local media to reduce the amount of misinformation published about food and its effects. She enjoys promoting wellness and helping people to get the information they need to stay well and prevent disease.

Nicky has a bachelor of science in Human Nutrition, a Post Graduate Diploma in Dietetics and is studying towards a Post Graduate Diploma in public health. She says the most valuable part of having good qualifications is her ability to work at all levels of public health nutrition.

One of the projects Nicky has been involved with is an initiative to improve the health of the 8,000 employees at Canterbury District Health Board by replacing unhealthy foods from vending machines and cafeterias with healthier choices. She is also involved with other health professionals in a project for overweight women who participate in a 6-week programme to help them make healthy lifestyle changes.

Nicky says people are initially resistant to change, but it is very rewarding to see behaviour change at a population level and know that you are making a big difference.

**“Sometimes in public health change is slow but when we make gains, they are generally big ones and this is hugely rewarding”**

