

Public health physicians are qualified medical doctors who choose to specialise in the health of groups or whole communities rather than working in individual healthcare.

Public health physicians are involved in promoting health and preventing disease by assessing a community's health needs and providing services to these communities. Partnerships with the communities they serve are key to successful outcomes.

Most public health physicians are involved in planning, funding and managing health services, the delivery of public health projects, communicable disease control as well as in academic areas such as research and teaching.

Like other public health roles the focus is on population health and prevention and on the underlying social factors that affect peoples health and wellbeing (the determinants of health – see page 2).

ACTIVITIES PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIANS MIGHT DO:

- research the health of a particular population or health issue
- plan, deliver and monitor for the health needs identified in that research

Public Health Physician

- set up key public health projects and programmes, for example in cardiovascular (heart) health or immunisation
- provide advice to senior managers and politicians on major health issues and initiatives
- lecture on public health at tertiary institutions.

What school subjects do you need?

You should aim for high marks in all NCEA subjects, particularly in mathematics, chemistry, physics biology and English.

What qualifications will you need?

First you will need to become a qualified doctor. This requires a Bachelors degree in Science and then a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery.

After this you will need to complete a year as a hospital intern and a minimum of a further two years clinical experience. After this medical training, to become a public health physician you will need to do specialist training for four years in the public health medicine training programme, which includes work experience and completing a Masters in Public Health.

Who employs public health physicians?

Many public health physicians are employed by the Ministry of Health or district health boards. Others are employed with universities as researchers or teachers. Public health physicians also provide services under contract as independent consultants.

CAREER 7:

PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIAN

DALE, Waitemata District Health Board

AS MANAGER OF THE HEALTH GAIN TEAM AT WAITEMATA DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD, Dale Bramley (Ngapuhi, Ngati Hine) provides clinical leadership and strategic direction for population health programmes to address diabetes and cardiovascular (heart) disease. Other programmes within his broad work area include cancer control, healthy lifestyles, child health and the quality use of medicines.

An important focus of his work is to reduce the inequalities that exist between the health of Māori and other New Zealanders. His passion for Māori health has taken him to international forums for indigenous health and to New York to pursue a Harkness fellowship.

Dale has qualified as a doctor, has a Masters of Public Health and is studying towards a Masters in Business Administration. He insists however that you don't have to be brilliant to pursue a career like his. He believes passion and persistence are key attributes along with dedication and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Dale attributes the success of his programmes to working with a broad range of other public health professionals whose combined work is essential to improving community health. One such programme is the Wellbeing in Schools project in which schools participate in a range of initiatives to improve and maintain good health including better nutrition, and increased physical activity.

Dale says creating links with primary care is also an important aspect of his work. This means that while the focus of his work is in preventing disease and maintaining wellness there is a need to care for those individuals who have become unwell.

Dale is also involved in health research using it to inform his day-to-day work. He says he is a great believer in the need for research, but he must be able to apply it to his work.

“I am committed to working in public health because I think there are greater gains to be made by working with communities for better health”

