Saving Lives through National Public Health Institutes

To be healthy, people everywhere need access to a robust public health system that can quickly and effectively respond to health threats. National public health institutes help ensure that tests are available to diagnose illness. They monitor and track diseases. They pinpoint the causes of outbreaks and how to stop them. They implement evidence-based programs and policies to prevent and minimize a wide range of health risks—from infectious and noncommunicable diseases to water- and foodborne outbreaks, alcohol- and tobacco-related conditions, injuries, and the health aftermath of disasters.

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CONTACT IANPHI

FINLAND SECRETARIAT
Teija Kulmala
IANPHI Secretary-General
National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)
P.O.B. 30
FI-00271 Helsinki, Finland
+358.40.5755094 tel
+358.9.773.2322 fax
IANPHI@thl.fi or teija.kulmala@thl.fi

U.S. SECRETARIAT
Courtenay Dusenbury
Director, IANPHI U.S. Secretariat
at Emory University’s Global Health Institute
1599 Clifton Road, Suite 6.101
Atlanta, Georgia 30322 USA
+1.404.727.1416 tel
+1.404.727.9745 fax
cdusenb@emory.edu

www.ianphi.org

Health threats know no borders. IANPHI is a global network of member institutes and public health partners, united by a belief in the importance of strong and connected national public health institutes to improve health and save lives around the world.
What are NPHIs?

Concerns about lives lost due to infectious diseases, the health aftermath of disasters, the increasing toll of tobacco use, injury and obesity, slow progress in reducing maternal and child deaths, and the challenge of providing care to aging populations have brought new attention to the need for strong national public health systems. Without systematic disease detection and control, disease prevention programs, and scientific research to inform government policy, countries cannot ensure the health of their citizens. More than 70 countries around the world have established national public health institutes (NPHIs) to coordinate and lead public health systems. Some, such as the U.S. CDC, Dutch RIVM, South African NICD, Brazil’s Fiocruz, and China CDC, have developed over time, while others, including the institute in Canada, were created in response to recent global public health threats such as SARS.

Although NPHIs vary in scope and size—from fledgling institutes focusing only on infectious diseases to those with comprehensive responsibility for research, programs, and policy for almost all public health threats—they share a national scope of influence and focus on the major public health problems affecting the country.

NPHIs use scientific evidence as the basis for policy implementation and resource allocation and are accountable to national governments and the public. Their key functions—including disease surveillance, detection, and monitoring; outbreak investigation and control; health information analysis for policy development; research; training; health promotion and health education; and laboratory science—are particularly critical in low-resource nations.

Why are NPHIs important?

NPHIs give countries a coordinated approach, resources, and tools to save lives:

- A focal point for developing and strengthening the national public health system
- Increased technical capacity to better respond to major causes of disease and death and to integrate and benefit from vertical programs for HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, vaccine-preventable diseases, and others
- A long-term strategic plan for an evidence-based, sustainable system that addresses major public health challenges
- Efficient use of existing resources and a central national strategy to fill the gaps, including leveraging and coordinating vertical resources from the donor community
- A strategic approach to meeting the requirements of the International Health Regulations and national and regional regulations, and increased capacity to respond decisively to public health threats and opportunities including avian influenza
- Public health training and a career home and scientific path forward for a cadre of locally educated and technically oriented public health experts
- Evidence-informed policy development and public health program execution

Who is leading this effort?

The International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other partners, was chartered in 2006 and is coordinated by secretariats at Emory University’s Global Health Institute and Finland’s National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). IANPHI’s 80 member institutes represent more than 78% of the world’s population.

IANPHI’s members believe that their collective history, knowledge, and scientific expertise are a powerful force for transforming public health systems in low-resource countries. In addition to hosting an annual scientific meeting and leadership development sessions for its members, IANPHI is collaborating with ten countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda—to create a new NPHI or to substantially increase capacity at an existing NPHI. These efforts also involve assistance from IANPHI members and other partners in developing strategic plans linked to goals, policy changes, funding plans, and project execution.

IANPHI’s initial investments in planning and organizational design have leveraged more than $50 million in contributions and in-kind donations from IANPHI member institutes and other donors.

How can I create an NPHI in my country?

For more information, contact:
Teija Kulmala
IANPHI Secretary-General
National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)
IANPHI@thl.fi or teija.kulmala@thl.fi
or
Courtenay Dusenbury
Director, IANPHI U.S. Secretariat
at Emory Global Health Institute
cdusenb@emory.edu
www.ianphi.org