

# Reflections on the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health: Past, Present and Future

An Interview with Dr. Suzanne Jackson

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At the University of Toronto, global health promotion was in its early beginnings in the 1990s, shares [Dr. Suzanne Jackson](#). Dr. Jackson is the director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre in Health Promotion at the University of Toronto, and an Associate Professor Emerita in the Social & Behavioural Health Sciences Division at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH). Throughout her career, she has been a driving force internationally in advancing the field of health promotion. Dr. Jackson described the rich history and evolution of health promotion from a local to global field and shared her personal experiences of leading knowledge and capacity building initiatives at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion at DLSPH to bring health promotion to the forefront of global health priorities. The WHO Collaborating Centre at the University of Toronto first came into being in 1997 when the Director of the Centre for Health Promotion, Dr. Irving Rootman, applied for the opportunity. Dr. Jackson took over the leadership of both the Centre for Health Promotion and the WHO CC in 2001. Under her leadership, the WHO Collaborating Centre at the DLSPH emerged as a site of innovation in health promotion capacity building, evaluation and knowledge exchange with local and global communities.



WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE AT THE DALLA LANA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) and the 1st WHO Conference on Health Promotion put forward a definition of health promotion that has stood the test of time and enabled consistent practice around the globe. The WHO's 2005 Bangkok Charter for Health

Promotion in a Globalized World further helped guide the world's attention to the global nature of health promotion and how the efforts of individual countries interact to impact health beyond borders. Although its global status was acknowledged by health promoters, the wide scope and breadth of health promotion as a field that intersected with various sectors outside of the health system remained unrecognized by global health practitioners.

“The WHO sees itself as an evidence-based organization, so mainstreaming health promotion meant [amassing] a broad evidence base exploring the importance of health promotion in different streams of the public health arena,” shares Dr. Jackson. To achieve this goal, WHO turned to its international network of scholars at research institutions around the world known as the WHO Collaborating Centres. Included in this network were Dr. Jackson and her team at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion at the University of Toronto who were invited to investigate the role of [health promotion during natural disasters](#), with a focus on initiatives in low and middle-income countries.

“The WHO was trying to make this connection to evidence [on health promotion] so they had particular groups of academics around the world [at the Collaborating Centres] that they could rely on for getting the latest information and doing the best work.” – Dr. Suzanne Jackson

Like all WHO Collaborating Centres in the Americas Region, the WHO CC in Health Promotion has a primary link to the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and is engaged to assist PAHO to meet its strategic agenda in the health promotion arena through policy research and the development of guides and training workshops. In order to work effectively in the Region, it is important to speak English and Spanish with Portuguese and French as assets. Dr. Jackson recounts that “the Collaborating Centres were frequently brought together by PAHO to consult on a wide array of different projects and challenges”.

The Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion at the DLSPH has historically worked with other Collaborating Centres in the Americas, such as CEDETES (Centro para el Desarrollo y Evaluacion de Politicas y Tecnologia en Salud Publica) at Universidad de Valle (Colombia) and the Centre for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. These three WHO CCs, as well as several others, worked together on several projects, including a Mayor's Kit for Healthy Communities and Municipalities, a set of recommendations to policy-makers about evaluating health promotion initiatives in the Americas, and development of a guide to evaluate healthy communities and municipalities. To this day, the WHO Collaborating Centre at the DLSPH continues to focus some of its efforts to improve evaluation practices for health promotion in the Americas.

“One of the challenges that we have had within health promotion is how to measure success and outcomes in health promotion. Given that it’s both a process and leads to outcomes, it has been a challenging arena to work on health promotion evaluation. This is one of the areas of work that has been tackled by different academics around the world.” – Dr. Suzanne Jackson

Dr. Jackson’s most memorable project to-date has been the development of [PAHO’s Guide to Economic Evaluation in Health Promotion in collaboration with CEDETES](#). The objective of this project that took place between 2002 and 2007 was to develop a resource guide for health promotion practitioners to help them work with economic evaluators. As economic evaluation is a distinct area of expertise that usually falls outside the scope of health promotion training, the Centre participated in engaging health promotion practitioners with economic evaluation experts in Colombia, Cuba and Canada to explore the intersection of these disciplines. Through this collaboration, economic evaluation experts benefitted from this opportunity to understand the goals and challenges of health promotion, and shared methods of conducting economic evaluations that are relevant to health promotion practice. Instead of trying to give health promotion practitioners the skills to conduct economic evaluations, this Guide created a bridge of understanding to enable the two disciplines to work together.

Over the years, the WHO Collaborating Centre at the DLSPH has continued to honour its long-standing commitment to leadership in health promotion education; its role has always connected graduate students in Global Health at the DLSPH with opportunities to learn and gain work experience in global health promotion. The Collaborating Centre acts as a hub for graduate students to get involved with the Centre’s projects with the WHO and PAHO offices. Currently, the Centre has been working with PAHO to update a [Virtual Course on Health Promotion](#), which is accessible through the Virtual Campus for Public Health on the PAHO website. Other projects for the next four years include highlighting the role of health promotion in primary care, updating the Guide for Economic Evaluation in Health Promotion, and making recommendations about mobilizing civil society in community health.

Going forward, the Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion will be housed within the DLSPH’s recently established [Centre for Global Health](#) led by Prof. Erica Di Ruggiero. We look forward its new chapter under Prof. Jackson’s leadership.