

Winter 2024 – MPH Health Promotion Practicums

I.A.

Public Health Agency of Canada, Equity Policy Division

I completed my winter practicum working as a Junior Policy Analyst in the Health Equity Policy Division at PHAC, specifically with the Intersectoral Partnerships and Initiatives (IPI) team which aligned very well with my dedication to promoting social justice and health equity for populations experiencing marginalization. I was given the opportunity to work on the "health impact assessment (HIA)" file which was created in 2019 after the passing of the Impact Assessment Act (IAA) to include the assessment of social, health and economic impacts on communities living near large-scale natural resource or infrastructure development project sites including but not limited to a gold mine, an oil pipeline, a hydro-electric project, a highway, a dam and a nuclear plant. I spearheaded an evidence review investigating the mental health impacts of large-scale natural resource and infrastructure projects in Canada. Further, I developed a project plan, completed the abstract and full-text screening, assigned roles to other impact assessment team members, and contributed to drafting the methods section of the evidence review. I also developed a draft glossary of mental health and impact assessment terms and consulted with several teams to collect feedback. Additionally, I contributed to developing briefing materials, summaries, presentations, creating an infographic, report writing, working group member coordination and additional ad-hoc request. Overall, this practicum significantly improved my understanding of health equity in a policy setting and I'm extremely pleased with all that I have learned and accomplished throughout the term.

M.C.

Health Canada

During my practicum at Health Canada's Mental Health and Substance Use Integration Directorate, most of my work has been supporting deliverables and work by the Federal, Provincial/Territorial Assistant Deputy Minister Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use. One of their priorities relates to supports for individuals with complex needs, and I have worked extensively on two deliverables related to this priority: Provincial/Territorial (PT) Snapshots for Complex Needs, and Health Human Resource (HHR) Interviews. Regarding the PT Snapshots, PTs were sent a questionnaire about programs and interventions in their jurisdictions that support people with complex needs. I analyzed the data, and created a report along with a visual of the findings that is going to be shared with the committee. For the HHR interviews, I developed an interview guide that is being used to interview different PT stakeholders about the state of HHR in their jurisdiction relating specifically to people with complex needs. I will also be helping with data analysis and writing up the findings once the interviews are completed.

Along with these specific projects, I have helped the committee and my team with other smaller tasks, including logistical planning for an in-person FPT ADM Committee Meeting taking place in Toronto in May.

E.M.C.

United Way British Columbia - Healthy Aging

For my practicum, I supported the United Way British Columbia (UWBC) Healthy Aging team. I was given the opportunity to contribute to several unique projects, including an implementation guide to support the implementation of social prescribing and Community Connectors (link workers) in communities across British Columbia, as well as an orientation/training program for Community Connectors. I was also tasked with interviewing Regional Community Developers, key members of the Healthy Aging team, to write up profiles of communities in their respective regions across the province that demonstrate how effective cross-sector collaboration to support the healthy aging of community-dwelling older adults occurs in practice.

Throughout the practicum I was also able to attend and support several Community of Practice's with Community Connectors/link workers in British Columbia, as well as observe several grant review committee meetings where I gained insight into how funds are allocated and distributed equitably to community organizations by a large non-profit organization.

H.D.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

During my placement as a Student Policy Analyst at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), I was immersed in a dynamic environment focused on health equity and the social determinants of health. My role encompassed a range of responsibilities, including research, analysis, and synthesis of information on pertinent health issues. One of the key projects I contributed to was the SGBA Plus Integration in Surveillance (SISP) project, which aimed to enhance disaggregated data for a better understanding of health disparities.

A significant portion of my work involved conducting a thematic analysis of qualitative evidence gathered through dialogue sessions with surveillance colleagues. This analysis culminated in identifying seven key themes crucial for informing future decision-making processes within PHAC. Independently, I drafted a comprehensive "What We Heard" report summarizing these findings, distributed internally to key stakeholders. Collaboration was at the heart of my practicum experience. I actively engaged with my co-workers to gather additional feedback and ensure the report's accuracy and relevance. This collaborative effort underscored the supportive and inclusive culture within the organization. To disseminate the findings effectively, I presented the themes derived from the thematic analysis through various mediums, including Lunch and Learn sessions and formal presentations. Additionally, I created an infographic representation of the report's key findings to enhance accessibility and engagement among stakeholders.

In summary, my practicum experience was characterized by meaningful contributions to advancing the understanding of health equity and the social determinants of health within PHAC. Through my work on the SISP project and other initiatives, I gained practical experience in applying SGBA Plus and translating research into actionable insights to inform policy agendas. My accomplishments during the practicum reflect my commitment to excellence and my passion for promoting health equity for all Canadians.

B.D.S.

Dalla Lana School of Public Health

This practicum was conducted with a team from the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, supervised by Aaron M. Orkin. During my practicum, I learned about Canadian and global guidelines for community engagement and peer-led health delivery, contributing to the development of a protocol for a peer-led HIV care project. This project allowed me to apply my experience from Brazil and learn about successful practices in Canada. Through this project, I also had the experience of collaborating and building meaningful relationships with stakeholders, including community members, by presenting our protocol and implementing received feedback. This project will have a significant impact by empowering peer workers and people experiencing homelessness and hopefully will highlight the effectiveness and importance of community engagement and peer-led initiatives in health delivery. Additionally, I had the experience of conducting process and outcome evaluation for the Canadian Red Cross Opioid Harm Reduction program, funded by Health Canada. This was a unique program with impactful results, training laypersons to respond to opioid poisoning and distributing free intranasal naloxone. Overall, the practicum was instrumental in enhancing my skills in all stages of community-based participatory research, implementation science, knowledge synthesis, community engagement, and program evaluation. It has also provided valuable insights into the health system and community resources in Toronto.

I.M.S.F.
Public Health Agency of Canada

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is a federal institution that focuses on health promotion, chronic disease, injury, and infectious disease prevention and control, and preparing for and responding to public health emergencies. The Canadian Public Health Service is a program within PHAC that aims to build public health capacity by matching Public Health Officers (PHOs) and Student PHOs with public health units to support ongoing and emerging public health needs. I completed my practicum as a Student PHO with the Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU). NWHU's catchment area in Northwestern Ontario covers around 1/5th of the province with a population of 82,000 over 19 municipalities, 39 First Nation communities, and two unincorporated territories. I worked on three projects:

1. **Emergency Management:** I worked on several components for NWHU's Emergency Management Program, including updating their Emergency and Surge Response Plan to align with the new provincial Emergency Management Guidelines and developing a briefing note that proposes an updated approach to business continuity planning. I also created a guidance document that includes a logic model of NWHU's Emergency Management program, and sub-sections with additional details for each component.
2. **Wellness Program:** I created a guidance document that includes a logic model of NWHU's Wellness Program, and sub-sections with additional details for each component. I also prepared an evaluation framework for the program with evaluation questions, indicators, and suggested data collection points and methods.
3. **Cost of Doing Business in Northwestern ON:** I conducted research using publicly available literature and internal documents to prepare a briefing note describing factors that may explain potentially increased operating costs for public health in the region. Findings may assist NWHU and its partners with strategic planning, funding, and budget decisions, especially in the midst of recent changes to public health delivery and financing in 2024.

N.E.B.K.

Afya na Haki (Evidence Generation Department)

I completed my practicum at Afya na Haki (Ahaki), situated in Nakwero, Uganda. During this period, I actively participated in the development of several proposals and grants, alongside contributing to the drafting of a manuscript addressing the technological needs and challenges faced by African vaccine manufacturers. Additionally, I was deeply involved in a data collection project focusing on youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services in Uganda. Afya na Haki is a non-governmental organization committed to addressing various issues in the fields of Health, Human Rights, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, employing an Africentric framework. Much of the work I undertook revolved around Africentrism and was centered on these three themes. In the proposal development process, I engaged in brainstorming and ideation sessions, and I played a significant role in the writing stage. These proposals and grants often aimed to enhance the capacity of African individuals and organizations to advocate for issues aligned with Ahaki's core themes. Regarding the manuscript development, I conducted key informant interviews, transcribed the interviews, and analyzed the findings. Furthermore, for the data collection project, I participated in pre-testing the interview guide and conducted focus group discussions and key informant interviews with adolescents aged 10-24, peer support workers, and healthcare professionals. The interviews centered on access to sexual and reproductive health services. My time at Afya na Haki has been invaluable, offering a unique opportunity to explore Africentrism. As an African, I realized that colonization stripped agency from African people, and neocolonialism perpetuates marginalization on the continent. Through my work, including proposals, manuscripts, and data collection, my primary aim was to contribute to fostering positive African narratives and empowering African individuals and organizations to develop African solutions to African challenges.

S.J.W.L.

Public Health Agency of Canada, COVID-19 Epidemiology and Surveillance

Over the course of my placement, I primarily supported three interconnected projects, including the synthesis of the Surveillance Indicator Report (SIR), analysis of the SIR Evaluation Survey, and the development of an interactive respiratory virus dashboard. The SIR is a biweekly internal briefing product for senior management that provides a complete overview of the current respiratory situation across Canada, including surveillance information for SARS-CoV-2, influenza, and RSV. Throughout my placement, I engaged with both the production and operational side of the SIR file, which provided great exposure for cultivating strong leadership skills. The SIR Evaluation Survey was implemented to assess how the SIR was used by recipients, and I was responsible for preparing the detailed report and accompanying slide deck to be shared with internal stakeholders and used for future surveillance planning. Finally, the internal dashboard is a knowledge translation product that contributes towards integrated respiratory reporting and provides a weekly, high-level overview of surveillance indicators and key messages across the three viral respiratory illnesses. I participated in the development and maintenance of the dashboard, including exploring and receiving training on PowerBI, a data visualization software. Across the three projects, I liaised with diverse epidemiologists and knowledge experts and had ample opportunities to engage in cross-team collaboration.

E.L.

National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health

I completed my second practicum placement at the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (NCCEH). The NCCEH is one of six National Collaborating Centres created in 2005 to foster linkages and provide knowledge translation within Canada's public health community. The centres are funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) through the National Collaborating Centres for Public Health (NCCPH) program. The NCCEH is hosted within the BC Centre for Disease Control at the Provincial Health Services Authority in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In this practicum placement, I supported two projects. Firstly, I supported a Pan-Canadian Heat Alert and Response Systems (HARS) Stocktake. The objective of the project is to compile a comprehensive inventory of heat adaptation interventions used by health authorities and provincial and territorial governments in Canada, to inform future plans and actions to enhance HARS across Canada. My responsibilities included conducting an environmental scan of the web sites of all regional health authorities, provincial governments and territorial governments across Canada for information on their heat response activities, and contributing to the development of pan-Canadian HARS implementation survey and key informant interview guide, which will be carried out over the coming months.

The second project I supported was an extreme heat media engagement project. The objective of the project is to engage with media to better understand challenges and opportunities associated with reporting on risks related to EHEs, with a view to inform collaborative development of solutions with public health. I supported the development and revision of a project workplan, including sections on scope, methods, resources, and scheduling for the project. Additionally, I drafted outreach materials including a project summary document to disseminate to prospective advisory panel members.

S.M.

Centre for Global Health, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

In 2021, the University of Toronto received a grant from the Mastercard Foundation to support collaborations with various African partner institutions under an initiative titled Africa Higher Education Health Collaborative. The Collaborative-aiming to educate and develop the next generation of African leaders who will support social transformation within and beyond Africa-encompasses three pillars: Health Employment, Health Entrepreneurship, and Health Ecosystems. The Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH), whose Mastercard Foundation Secretariat sits in the Centre for Global Health, is co-leading projects under the Health Employment pillar, broadly aiming to strengthen the capacity of all partner institutions to train public health researchers, practitioners and educators who can collaborate to help address pressing global health challenges. During my practicum, I was involved in all the Collaborative projects of which DLSPH is part, with special emphasis on the Junior Faculty Development program and Women in Global Health Leadership Fellowship. My role involved collaborating and communicating with our partners, developing and administering both process- and outcome-focused evaluations (including those examining program governance), and offering evidence-based guidance around curriculum design. In addition to strengthening technical skills such as program evaluation and curriculum development, I had the opportunity to reflect on concepts such as co-design, and reinforced strategies for practicing reflexivity and collaborating equitably with partners in low-and-middle-income contexts, both of which are learnings I will carry forward and amplify awareness around in my global health work.

T.T.N.

Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health, Ontario

I completed my practicum in the Healthy Behaviours Unit at the OCMOH. During my practicum, I was able to actively engage in the review process of the Ontario Public Health Standards, which identifies the minimum expectations for public health programs and services to be delivered by Public Health Units/Boards of Health. Specifically, I supported the development of the draft Comprehensive Health Promotion standard and Protocol by 1) reviewing and analyzing the Public Health Unit Annual Service Plans to assess the types of activities and programs of public health intervention for Chronic Disease Prevention and Injury Prevention; 2) attending Standard Review Group meetings and taking notes to help brief senior management; 3) reviewing written input that the Ministry received from Public Health Units on the proposed Comprehensive Health Promotion Standard and Protocol and inputting the feedback into a detailed spreadsheet for analysis to help inform edits to the draft Standard and Protocol; and 4) scoping potential research question(s) (that could lead to an evidence review for Public Health Ontario) to better understand the current landscape of Chronic Disease Prevention interventions and programs targeting social, natural, and built environments with a goal of informing the development of a potential Comprehensive Health Promotion Reference Document (as an extension of the OPHS review).

I also supported the advancement of activities under the OCMOH Upstream Chronic Disease Prevention Framework by conducting a jurisdictional scan on indicators for upstream CDP, including how to measure relationships, partnerships, and collaboration - which also align with the draft Comprehensive Health Promotion Standard and Protocol, and collating a list of government program areas with cross-cutting public health related impacts for participation in an OPS-Wide Directors Forum on Chronic Disease Prevention.

T.O.

Public Health Agency of Canada

Black populations within Canada experience high rates of mental health challenges due to negative experiences such as anti-Black racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, and other negative experiences that Black individuals encounter due to their race. During my practicum placement, I worked on a literature review that focuses on the mental health of Black women, and more specifically, Black mothers. The results showed that anti-Black racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, and other negative experiences that Black individuals, including Black women, encounter due to their race can take a toll on their mental health. These experiences can lead to depression, anxiety, drug addiction, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and more. Furthermore, during my practicum, I supported on a presentation that highlighted the social determinants of health and how various factors such as race, education, income, and employment can impact the mental health of Black Canadians. During the presentation, I also discussed anti-Black racism and the importance of recognizing its impacts on Black Canadians. Additionally, I conducted a review of the literature on the various sub-populations of Black Canadians. These subpopulations included Black refugees, Black youth, Black LGBTQIA2+ populations, Black persons living with a disability, and Black seniors. The research related to the mental health of these populations in Canada.

S.R.

Center for Global Health

The Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT-IT), hosted by TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases of the World Health Organization (WHO), stands as a global partnership dedicated to equipping professionals with the necessary skills to confront complex health challenges. SORT-IT focuses on research capacity building, evidence generation, and leveraging data for informed decision-making, with a commitment to advancing global health equity through collaboration and innovation. In its inaugural year, SORT-IT partnered with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health to build sustainable capacity in vaccine confidence research. The Canadian SORT-IT program engages diverse participants from countries such as Armenia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Canada, facilitating cross-regional collaboration. The practicum project, led by the Peel Region Team, aims to investigate vaccine uptake among community-based COVID-19 clinics compared to mass vaccination clinics within Peel Region, with a focus on extracting lessons learned for broader application and contribution to implementation science. Divided into three modules, SORT-IT provides participants with dynamic learning experiences, emphasizing research methodology, data analysis, and evidence-to-impact strategies. Active participation and collaboration among stakeholders underscore the initiative's commitment to advancing global health outcomes. Currently, the research protocol has been submitted and is awaiting ethics approval from Public Health Ontario.

M.S.R.

University Health Network, Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine and Population Health

During my second practicum placement at the University Health Network's (UHN) Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine and Population Health, I engaged in a variety of projects aimed at advancing health equity and population health initiatives in the Toronto region. Primarily, I contributed to the Measuring Health Equity (MHE) initiative, in collaboration with Ontario Health, by conducting a comprehensive literature review on health equity data collection best practices, drafting training materials, and facilitating the community validation process of the translated MHE questionnaire. Additionally, I further supported the evaluation of the Stabilization and Connection Centre (SCC) for which I created data collection tools during my first practicum. This time around, I supported the revision of the data collection tools according to stakeholder feedback, and created a data collection plan along with project management tools, including a Gantt chart and work breakdown structure. Furthermore, I actively participated in the Social Medicine Housing initiative, assisting in the identification of eligible patients for permanent supportive housing. Beyond these core projects, I conducted various literature reviews to support ongoing research initiatives at the Centre. My practicum experience with the Social Medicine program provided valuable opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts and make tangible contributions toward improving health outcomes and promoting equity within communities.

A.U.R.

GreenShield Cares, GreenShield

My placement at GreenShield Cares, GreenShield as a Social Impact practicum student showcased how organizations can develop programs to target public health issues. My placement saw my involvement in various projects, but I was mainly responsible for working on GreenShield's oral health strategy. As a non-profit social enterprise, GreenShield has invested funding and developed programming for different health issues including making prescription drugs, mental health supports, and oral health services more accessible for equity-seeking populations. As the federal government announced the implementation of the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), a federal coverage program for dental services for equity-seeking Canadians (e.g., older adults), I was tasked with spearheading GreenShield's quarterly convening of its oral health partners and clinics, to collect data, insights, and information about the implications of the CDCP, understand where gaps in coverage may exist and which populations may be left out, and examine the barriers to accessing oral health care for equity seeking communities. With this documented and collected information, GreenShield aims to summarize and organize its findings to redistribute to its oral health partners. Other projects and tasks amidst my placement at GreenShield included producing government relations documents to position GreenShield as a thought partner for oral health care, and supporting the scaling of GreenShield's Essential Medicines Program for provincial expansion, and producing internal facing documents to organize and compile information (e.g., financial investments and impact measurement) to increase accessibility of necessary information for supervisors and executive teams.

J.R.S.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health - RBC Patient and Family Learning Space

During my practicum placement at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) within the RBC Patient & Family Learning Space (PFLS), I engaged in a hybrid format, alternating between on-site and remote work. Tasks encompassed a diverse range, including updating and revising community resource sheets, creating monthly calendars and event compilations, developing youth programming, conducting environmental scans, updating inventory, updating pamphlets, outreach, creating evaluation reports, creating visual materials for a book exchange initiative, and body work assistance in the space for in-person programming. As my practicum concludes, ongoing projects continue to shape the evolving landscape of patient and family education at CAMH. Objectives centered on enhancing educational resources, refining evaluation frameworks, and fostering interpersonal skills were met through active engagement and collaborative efforts. The practicum experience transcended traditional classroom learning, offering firsthand insights into long-term project management, teamwork dynamics, and community engagement. Ultimately, this practicum has equipped me with invaluable skills and experiences, positioning me as a competent and confident professional ready to contribute to public health initiatives. The impact of my work extends beyond the confines of the PFLS, making meaningful contributions to the well-being of CAMH clients and their families. As I transition from this placement, I carry forward a strengthened skill set and a deepened commitment to patient-centered care and community empowerment.

S.R.T.S.

Public Health Agency of Canada, Vaccination Behaviour and Confidence Unit

My placement during the winter practicum term was with the Vaccination Behaviour and Confidence Unit in the Infectious Diseases and Vaccination Programs Branch at the Public Health Agency of Canada. In this placement, I conducted a scoping review on immunization strategies to increase vaccine (both routine and specialized) uptake among people experiencing homelessness, people who use drugs and people with severe and persistent mental illness to inform an unreleased, major Agency report. The scoping review primarily explored the impact of these strategies on vaccine uptake and other related outcomes (e.g., barriers to vaccination and follow-up care, sample infection rates, etc.). Secondly, the review also sought to identify the barriers and facilitators to implementing these strategies, how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles were considered throughout the research project and the key lessons learned. Further, I completed an evidence brief based on the findings of the scoping review, as well as a PowerPoint slide deck to present at the Community for Vaccine Confidence Strategies (CVCS) meeting for various units within the Infectious Diseases and Vaccination Programming Branch. I also submitted an abstract on behalf of the VBAC Unit to the Canadian Immunization Conference, which profiles new research on immunization and vaccine research and strategies and discusses how they will impact decision-making, programming and policy.

L.V.

Opening Minds, Mental Health Commission of Canada

The practicum was conducted at the Research and Learning Design team within Opening Minds, Mental Health Commission of Canada. Opening Minds is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to offering training and resources for discussing mental health, transforming negative attitudes, and reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness.

As a practicum student, I focused on conducting research, synthesizing and summarizing findings on mental health challenges in the workplace to inform courses aimed at reducing stigma and promoting mental health. I translated the research findings for appropriate audiences, such as course participants and facilitators. In this way, I helped ensure that the evidence base for current courses was updated and new sector-specific mental health-related research was conducted. Alongside, I created replicable methods to conduct research, documented methodology for conducting research, and critically appraised evidence based on relevancy and quality. This involved creating templates to summarize applied research and grey literature reviews, as well as detailed tracking spreadsheets for data or evidence updates. Lastly, as a practicum student, I aided in creating replicable processes to scan knowledge products from other teams to help keep the evidence base of Opening Minds up to date. This involved collaborating with other team members to create a trackable file that maps similarities in research and allows for further exchange of knowledge products.

X.A.Z.

Stepped Care Solutions

This practicum experience focused on advancing public health promotion efforts through the implementation of person-centric engagement strategies and program evaluation methodologies. The objectives included enhancing communication skills, cultural adaptability, qualitative data analysis proficiency, and program measurement and evaluation expertise. Throughout the practicum, these objectives were achieved through active involvement in facilitating engagement sessions, contributing to co-design initiatives at a provincial level, conducting qualitative data sorting tasks, assisting in the development of program evaluation plans, and designing knowledge translation products. Notably, strong communication skills and cultural adaptability were demonstrated through effective engagement with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, while proficiency in data management and analysis was showcased through meticulous data sorting and report writing. Furthermore, involvement in strategic planning activities highlighted the application of program measurement and evaluation principles to inform evidence-based decision-making. Overall, this practicum provided a comprehensive learning experience, equipping me with essential competencies to drive impactful public health promotion initiatives in diverse community settings.