

2013 • 2014



New Professionals Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT



2013-14 Members

Melanie Fortune, MPH (Co-Chair)

Caitlyn Timmings, MPH (Co-Chair)

Megha Bhavsar, MPH(c)

Alex Mayer, MPA

Eric Nadalin, MHK

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Mission

The **New Professionals Working Group** (NPWG), the Ontario Public Health Association's (OPHA) newest working group, was established in May 2013 with a mission to *increase the engagement of students and new professionals with the OPHA by delivering value and benefits to those working towards a career in the public health field.*

The NPWG enhances membership value for new professionals and students from across Ontario

Principles

Situating the efforts of the NPWG, five core principles have guided the motivation and vision of the working group's activities over the past year. The core principles, detailed below, will continue to be central to and guide the activities of the NPWG in the future.



1. New professionals are an expanding group: Academic training opportunities for public health are expanding rapidly. In the past five years alone, there have been at least four new programs in public health at the graduate level. Building capacity for engagement of this target population is a strategic move for future membership.

2. New professionals are potential career-long members: Creating positive, memorable experiences for students at a time when they need networking supports the most can be an opportune time to engage career-long members. OPHA has an opportunity to make its first impression of what our professional organization stands for.

3. New professionals bring excellent value to the OPHA: New professional members may be more engaged than established members if given opportunities. During early career years, people are more likely to seek opportunities for self-improvement outside of their direct workplace. These members are generally more willing to contribute to the association by providing vibrant opportunities to other members.

4. New professional engagement begets more engagement: A connected and expanding new professional community signals richer opportunities to build up one's professional network with like-minded peers in the public health field, adding significant value to an OPHA membership. Through social media networks and in-person networking activities, our vibrant and engaged community of new professionals can itself become the conduit to a meaningful and rewarding OPHA membership experience.

5. New professionals want to see clear membership value: It is instrumental for the OPHA to clearly demonstrate the value of joining the OPHA as a member. An assumed value of affiliation with a professional association is not sufficient for today's new professionals. Additionally, a passive membership at a high financial cost does not provide enough value to potential members who are far from their high-earning years and who may not have a membership, conference or workshop cost footed by their workplace. Instead, tangible and experiential benefits and opportunities must be provided and communicated to new professionals.

Year in Review

Since the NPWG's inception in May 2013, the OPHA has seen a surge in initiatives catering to new professionals, and consequently, a meaningful rise in new professional memberships from 44 to 74. It is estimated that as a group, new professionals make up 130 of OPHA members. Below are some of our key deliverables this term that have contributed to this success.

Mar 28, 2013

Webinar Presentation: 'Your Debut in Public Health: Insights from a Panel of New Professionals'

Over 150 people signed up for the first webinar, entitled *Your Debut in Public Health: Insights from a Panel of New Professionals*. During this session, three panelists discussed their professional ascent into their respective public health careers and shared their key learnings.

150+
registrants

"Great webinar, it really confirmed that I want to continue to work in the field of Public Health and gave me motivation to continue in my current position until I can find a job that I love, and that those jobs are out there!" -webinar participant

May 31, 2013

Official Establishment of the NPWG

A thorough application process was completed and the NPWG was officially established. Throughout the next year, the two co-chairs and three members at-large committed over 500 hours to achieving its mission. Collectively, the group had a strong team dynamic and all members felt their involvement was meaningful and satisfying.

"As a NPWG member, I have been provided with opportunities to assist and encourage my peers while developing my own competencies as a public health professional. The motivation and enthusiasm of fellow working group members left me energized to provide similar opportunities to new professionals entering a career in public health."

- Reflection of 2013/14 NPWG member

Aug 16, 2013

NPWG Student Presentation to MPH Course (University of Waterloo)

In August, a NPWG representative visited the University of Waterloo's MPH course to highlight the benefits of becoming a student member with the OPHA. The presentation clearly resonated with the audience, as the two weeks following the presentation saw OPHA's membership increase from 43 to 62 new professional members, a **44% increase!**

Oct 22, 2013

Networking Soirée at the OPHA 2013 Fall Forum (Toronto, ON)

At the end of the 2013 Fall Forum, the NPWG facilitated a *Networking Soirée* whereby individuals interested or starting out in public health could sit down, discuss their interests, and seek career guidance from 10 established public health figures from across Ontario. The first OPHA event of its kind, it was incredibly well attended, boasting **over 50** participants.

"The mentors were very encouraging and kind! I learnt a lot by coming to this event."

"Great event, amazing selection of mentors. The keynote speaker was very inspiring!"

- Two of over 50 *Networking Soirée* attendees

Year in Review (cont'd)

Nov 01, 2013

Launch of NPWG's Blog: 'Public Health Perspectives'

On November 1st, the NPWG introduced "**Public Health Perspectives**" - a blog whereby OPHA new professional members could contribute content and gain recognition for their insights. Since its inception, six bimonthly posts on a variety of topics relevant to new professionals have been published. The blog has had over 800 views. The January/February blog post about 'landing one's first job' proved to be the most popular, with approximately **145 views on its first day!** The blog's content is now regularly featured on the OPHA website's homepage with a new blog post launched every two months.



Feb 12, 2014

Webinar Presentation: 'Now What?! Navigating the Transition between University and the Public Health Workforce'

In February 2014, the NPWG hosted their second webinar entitled '*Now What?! Navigating the Transition between University and the Public Health Workforce.*' The webinar provided the experiences of a new public health professional as well as that of an experienced director. The **42** participants heard engaging anecdotes and tips for landing their first job in public health.

"Thank you for the excellent work that you do at the OPHA." - webinar participant

A circular inset photograph showing Peegen Walsh, OPHA Executive Director, seated at a table during a networking soiree. She is engaged in conversation with other attendees. In the background, a banner for the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) is visible.

OPHA
Executive
Director
Peegen Walsh
shares her career
journey at the 2014
Networking Soiree

Mar 06, 2014

Networking Soirée at OPHA/NRC 2014 Annual Forum (Toronto, ON)

In March 2014, the NPWG was invited to recreate the magic of its first *Networking Soirée* at the 2014 OPHA/NRC Annual Conference. The NPWG succeeded in improving upon its original attendance numbers, with **61** new professionals and 9 public health leaders in attendance. With its now-proven ability to draw a crowd, the *Networking Soirée* was officially listed on the 2014 OPHA/NRC Annual Conference program and attracted generous sponsorship from Public Health Ontario. The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, with the only reproach being that the NPWG should be providing these networking opportunities more often!

A circular inset photograph showing a group of people at a networking soiree. A man in a white shirt is speaking to a group of women seated at a table. A banner for the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) is visible in the background.

"Great networking event! It was well implemented. Met some awesome people working in public health."

-Networking Soirée attendee

NPWG member Eric Nadalin shares advice to students at 2014 Networking Soiree

Lessons Learned

The working group's first year provided excellent opportunities to better understand and engage new professionals. The most prominent lessons learned are highlighted below.

1. Types of new professionals engaging with the OPHA

There are three primary audiences who are particularly interested in the NPWG's activities. Their unique profiles and interests motivate targeted opportunities



NPWG
Co-Chair
Caitlyn
Timmings
talks to fellow
new professionals

Students in a variety of public health related disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate level are prominent attendees and are interested in understanding how to navigate the field and what to expect post-graduation.

New graduates seeking employment are an active subgroup that seeks tips and information about how to secure a job in public health.

Those **new to the public health workforce** in their first three to five years make up a third type of new professional. These individuals are motivated to acquire skills to advance themselves during the early phase of their career.

2. Interest amongst new professionals in contributing to the NPWG

Outside of the formal working group, there has also been a strong interest demonstrated by others in contributing to the NPWG's mission. Even after the working group's application period had closed, there were 24 applications and inquiries about getting involved. This highlights the need to expand the ways new professionals can meaningfully contribute to the OPHA.

3. Divergence of interest in OPHA membership and NPWG activities

Participation in NPWG events by new professionals who are not OPHA members has been unexpectedly strong. Positive feedback from events did not consistently correlate to increased OPHA membership. This tension led to new strategies, such as requiring a fee for event participation by non-members. It is important to continue to expand opportunities for new professional members of the OPHA to build membership value.

4. OPHA staff and events provides excellent capacity to complement NPWG's mission

Existing OPHA events and infrastructure, such as webinars and social media, have provided excellent means for the NPWG to engage its audience without placing demand on the organization. Additionally, the OPHA staff has been integral in supporting working group activities such as, disseminating communications, relaying information and opportunities, fielding inquiries, and offering technical/logistical assistance. This support has been crucial for success.

5. Financial support for NPWG activities and operations

Working group members gave their time and energies generously to meetings, operational activities and events. Given the geographic distribution of its members there were some personal costs to travel to host events and other activities. Further, while web-based technologies permitted video conferencing, opportunities to collaborate in person would have been beneficial to spur creativity and collaboration. A modest operational budget would be especially empowering for the NPWG's efforts.

F Future Growth

Looking forward, the NPWG is motivated to continue its commitment to students, new graduates and those new to working in the public health field. To expand the opportunities for members within this group, we envision the following growth areas.

1. Networking Events

Overwhelming praise of the networking events hosted this past year has indicated that facilitating opportunities for new professionals to meet others like themselves and leaders in the public health field is an important function of the NPWG. Going forward, maintaining and expanding the frequency and diversity of opportunities for networking is recommended.

2. Mentorship Programming

Interest in one-on-one mentorship opportunities amongst new professionals is clear. The OPHA is well positioned to provide a mentorship program given the wealth of experiences in its membership and growing new professional population. Connecting experienced professionals with new professionals would attract new members and provide meaningful engagement. The OPHA's Leadership Centre can provide opportunistic alignment with this direction.

3. Social Media

Efforts are underway to build a comprehensive and exclusive communication platform for the OPHA's new professional members to connect to one another and career-related opportunities, enhancing membership benefits. The LinkedIn platform can be an ideal primary method to interact with the target audience, as it is accessible and already career focused. LinkedIn content would include our current initiatives, events and blog postings, along with career advice, job postings and current public health topics. This can be complemented with increased activity on social media feeds through more member contributions to the Public Health Perspectives Blog.

4. Award Programming

Awards such as the Sheela Basrur award can be an important means to recognize the important contributions new professionals make to the organization and the broader public health community. Going forward, the working group is in favor of strategic thinking about current awards and possibilities to enhance their visibility and alignment with the NPWG mission.



All smiles with public health leaders following NPWG's successful 2014 networking soiree. From left to right: Ann Fox, Pegeen Walsh, Caitlyn Timmings, Alex Mayer, Anne Birks, Eric Nadalin, and Melanie Fortune.

OPIHA

Ontario Public Health Association

l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario

Established/Établi 1949

439 University Ave, Suite 1850
Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1Y8

www.opha.on.ca
info@opha.on.ca