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Consensus on the future core functions and competency requirements of public health nutritionists

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Abstract
Competency standards provide the architecture for workforce development and serve to inform workforce preparation, continuing professional development and quality assurance via registration and credentialing systems. Developing consensus on competency requirements for the developing global public health nutrition workforce is therefore an important strategic initiative. This study aimed to assess the level of consensus amongst an international panel of public health nutrition leaders regarding the essential competencies required for effective public health nutrition practice.

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CONSENSUS ON THE FUTURE CORE FUNCTIONS AND COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS

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Competency standards provide the architecture for workforce development and serve to inform workforce preparation, continuing professional development and quality assurance via registration and credentialing systems. Developing consensus on competency requirements for the developing global public health nutrition workforce is therefore an important strategic initiative. This study aimed to assess the level of consensus amongst an international panel of public health nutrition leaders regarding the essential competencies required for effective public health nutrition practice.

A modified Delphi study involving 3 rounds of questionnaires was administered amongst a panel of 40 public health nutrition leaders from government, academic and professional jurisdictions recruited from Australia, Indonesia, Finland, Thailand, Brazil, Canada, United Kingdom, Iran, USA and Scotland. The emphasis of the consensus development process was identification and prioritization of the core functions (work) and essential competency requirements for the future public health nutrition workforce.

Ratings and open-ended responses to over 50 functions and over 180 separate competency elements derived from the white and grey literature were prioritized over 3 delphi rounds identifying 19 core functions (rated by >50% of panelists as core) and ~120 competency elements rated as essential. These were categorised into 14 competency areas including enabling knowledge, analytical, nutrition science, public health systems, food and nutrition systems, communication, management, leadership, nutrition education, nutrition assessment, nutrition monitoring and surveillance, capacity building, intervention management and professional competency categories.

This study builds on earlier findings that there is strong international agreement about the competency requirements for public health nutrition, reflecting a growing global consensus. Essential competency units identified can be used to develop and review competency standards for public health nutrition, with an eye to enhancing workforce development into the future.