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Nordic School of Public Health  
NHV

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## 60 Years of Public Health





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## Introduction

Nordic School of Public Health NHV (NHV) was a pioneer within Nordic public health science and education during 1953-2014. The activities at NHV rested on the three pillars of public health, Nordic context and international outlook. The Nordic Council of Ministers (NMR) was the responsible body for NHV, which was earlier also known by its Swedish names 'Nordiska högskolan för folkhälsovetenskap' and 'Nordiska hälsovårdshögskolan'. NHV was financed by the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

In June 2013, NMR decided to close NHV on the basis that education in public health could now be found at other Nordic universities. As a result, academic activities at NHV ended on December 31, 2014.

NHV had a clear objective to generate Nordic synergy and added value by having Nordic perspectives and Nordic participants as well as Nordic examples in both education and research. NHV focussed much effort on Nordic collaborations and networking. NHV's mission statement was to create and disseminate knowledge that promotes good and equal health. Several evaluations demonstrated NHV's strong role within the field of public health in Europe. This joint Nordic mission within education and research generated a unique competence at NHV, since no other institute of higher education could demonstrate a similar profile. Having had the entire Nordic region as the base of its activities, NHV had the possibility to take advantage of the access to stimulating similarities and differences between the Nordic countries.

## History

Towards the end of the 1940s and early 1950s, discussions were held between representatives of the Nordic Medical Boards, international funding agencies, and the WHO about the need for a joint Nordic higher education in public health. The first courses commenced in Gothenburg in August 1953. In 1977, NHV became a formal institution under NMR, and in 1978 a Master of Public Health Programme (MPH) was initiated. At the same time, the first three professors were employed at NHV in health services management, epidemiology and biostatistics as well as in preventive and social medicine. A new step in NHV's history was taken in 1987, when NHV received increased resources and larger premises, initiated research training for Doctor of Public Health (DrPH), and became a WHO Collaborating Centre.





## Research

NHV conducted research in public health and served as a centre of knowledge for public authorities and society at large. Characteristics of NHV's research were large Nordic projects and comparative research with high quality. Other hallmarks of NHV were interdisciplinary studies and current research fields based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Examples of research areas included epidemiology, child public health, health services management, health promotion, global health, public mental health, pharmacoepidemiology, infection control, universal design, migration and health, disability, and healthy ageing.

Furthermore, NHV was a hub for several networks and knowledge exchange involving researchers from the Nordic countries and other parts of the world e.g., EU, Vietnam and Nepal. Examples of Nordic research networks:

'NordChild', a series of studies that in 1984, 1996, and 2011 delineated children's health and well-being in the five Nordic countries. Variables such as long-term illness, psychosomatic symptoms, and quality of life were investigated along with social and economic factors. To be accessible for future research after NHVs closure, the databases were transferred to other Nordic institutions.

'The Nordic Lifestyle Workshop' was a research project about intersectoral collaboration focussing on parents, preschools, health organizations, and researchers to increase knowledge and awareness about health matters to strengthen the environment around preschool children.

[www.nordiskalivsstilsverkstan.com](http://www.nordiskalivsstilsverkstan.com)

'The Nordic Health Promotion Network' aimed to deepen the cooperation in research and education within health promotion in the Nordic countries. <http://nhprn.wordpress.com>

'NorPEN' was a research network that provided opportunities for Nordic cross-national population studies within pharmacoepidemiology.

<http://www.norpen.org>



## Education

NHV's educational programmes were: Diploma in Public Health 60 ECTS (with three different themes; Infection Control, General Public Health and Universal Design), MPH 75 ECTS and 120 ECTS as well as DrPH 240 ECTS. During 2000-2010, NHV also educated Master of Science in Public Health (MScPH) students.

Over the years, 102 diploma students (of whom 95 were in Infection Control), 555 MPH, and 72 DrPH completed their training at NHV. In addition, NHV also provided commissioned education and hosted workshops, conferences, and networking events.

The objective of NHV's education was to strengthen the professionalization of public health work in the Nordic countries through research-based academic education in public health with an international academic standard that addressed key challenges for public health and the health systems.

From the beginning, courses and programmes at NHV targeted individuals who already had a university degree and who were professionally connected to health care, social services, or health promotive work. Consequently, many of NHV's students were professionally active adults who continued their education and thereby contributed to the exchange between theory and practice which was a hallmark feature of NHV courses. Thereby, NHV was a unique platform for further education for professionally active individuals.

The programmes were greatly appreciated by the students and had high quality with strict guidelines for examinations. Each change was preceded by well-documented investigations. In the 1990s, the higher education sector in Sweden was restructured and questions about the transferability of degrees from NHV between the Nordic countries arose.

As a Nordic institution, NHV could not be governed by national higher education systems in a single country since its responsible body NMR is a supranational organisation. Consequently, NHV could not be encompassed by the supervisory operations which followed the regulations for Swedish higher education. However, with reference to a special agreement for Nordic institutions, which states that the regulations of

the domicile country should be followed, NHV applied the Swedish higher education regulatory framework (the Higher Education Act, 1992:1434, and Higher Education Ordinance, 1993:100) for its activities. In Sweden, NHV's courses had academic recognition and could be credited for degrees and admission at other institutions of higher education according to the Higher Education Ordinance (HF Chap. 6, §6).

Graduates from NHV have met the knowledge requirements equivalent to Master- and DrPH-levels at other Nordic universities and institutes of higher education. Examinations at NHV were conducted as at other institutes of higher education. For a DrPH-degree, this meant that the doctoral student was examined by a committee of specialists within the field (at the level of associate professor or higher) from Nordic universities and institutions.





## International activities

Initially, NHV focussed on public health science in the Nordic countries, but soon it was obvious that this geographical limitation could not be accepted in an increasingly globalized world. It was necessary to reach outside the Nordic countries. The first international exchanges were seminars which were conducted in collaboration with the Nordic aid agencies and the WHO. These seminars targeted primarily leading health administrators from Africa and Asia. The overall theme of the seminars was 'Methods and Experience in Planning for Health', with varying sub themes such as Inequalities in Health and Health Care, Family Health, Accident Prevention and Intersectoral Action for Health.

The first real breakthrough regarding an institutional engagement outside the Nordic countries involved the Baltic region. With support from WHO and NMR, NHV created an educational project in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and universities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and somewhat later in Poland and Russia. The project BRIMHEALTH (Baltic Rim Partnership in Health), was a success for international public health education as well as a rewarding example of aid investment. The international profile became an important part of the activities at NHV, as well as one of NHV's educational goals – to 'include the European dimension'.

These and other initiatives for European fellowship contributed to the fact that NHV obtained a prominent position among the Schools of Public Health in Europe. This was evident through close collaborations with WHO, ASPHER

(Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region) and ESSOP (European Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health) as well as an active participation in several large EU-projects, especially regarding child health.

Later, an educational cooperation was established between NHV and several Nordic institutions (University of Tromsø [now UiT The Arctic University of Norway], the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Umeå University, Mid-Sweden University, and Tampere University) and Northern State Medical University in Russia. The cooperation aimed at establishing a School of Public Health and an MPH-programme in Arkhangelsk. The education is today part of the Russian public education.

## Publications

NHV produced articles in scientific journals, DrPH-theses, MScPH-theses, reports and MPH-theses. NHV theses and reports can be downloaded at [norden.org/nordpub](http://norden.org/nordpub).

NHV was presented in Socialmedicinsk tidskrift No 1, 2002, and in a supplement of [Scandinavian Journal of Public Health](http://sagepub.com) [http://sagepub.com], Spring 2015.

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Dean (2013-2014)

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