

The National Institute of Public Health

Ninety years training professionals and advancing public health knowledge

BY LAURA MAGAÑA-VALLADARES, KELLY COOPER

The Mexican School of Public Health was founded in 1922 by the Mexican government in response to the recommendations of the Welch-Rose report (published in the US in 1918) and has a rich history of 90 years of advanced training, service and research activities. It was the first school of public health in Latin America and the second in the Americas, after the School of Hygiene and Public Health at Johns Hopkins University.¹ In order to consolidate research, graduate training and continuing education, the School of Public Health merged with the Population Health Research Center and the Infectious Disease Research Center in 1987 to create the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP), or National Institute of Public Health (www.insp.mx).²⁻³ The merger has allowed the INSP to become one of the largest public health institutions in the developing world and an internationally recognised institution for research, training, and service.

In order to train the workforce to respond to existing and emerging public health challenges, the INSP offers a wide variety of training programmes. The INSP currently offers 28 professional and research-focused degree programmes, including the Master of Public Health with 10 concentration areas, Masters of Health Sciences with 11 areas of concentration, Doctorate in Public Health, Doctorate in Public Health Sciences, Specialty in Health Promotion, and Residence in Public Health and Preventive Medicine. The Institute has a total population of 750 active students and more than 240 fulltime professors.

To prepare its students to meet health challenges, the Institute offers a unique practicum experience through which Master of Public Health students develop public health competencies by working directly with communities across Mexico. The INSP creates collaborative relationships with the Ministry of Health at federal and state levels in order to identify diverse communities where there is a need to implement and evaluate public health interventions. The INSP establishes contracts with municipal authorities so that students can conduct their work in collaboration with community members. The practicum begins in the first semester of the Master of Public Health programme, con-



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Abstract

**DAS NATIONALE INSTITUT FÜR PUBLIC HEALTH:
90 JAHRE IM DIENSTE DER AUSBILDUNG UND DER FÖRDERUNG DES WISSENS IM
BEREICH PUBLIC HEALTH**

Das Nationale Institut für Public-Health (INSP) wurde von der mexikanischen Regierung 1922 gegründet und war das erste universitäre Institut auf diesem Gebiet in Lateinamerika. Diese moderne Lehr-, Forschungs- und Dienstleistungseinrichtung ist zu einer der größten Public-Health-Stellen in den Entwicklungsländern herangewachsen. Das Institut passt sich laufend an den sich wandelnden Ausbildungsbedarf des Gesundheitspersonals an. Zurzeit bietet es 28 kompetenzbasierte Studiengänge und Weiterbildung für Public-Health-Fachkräfte durch Fortbildungsstrategien. Die Aus- und Weiterbildungsprogramme werden in mehreren Formaten, wie Präsenzunterricht, E-Learning und B-Learning, durchgeführt. Das Institut wurde von nationalen und internationalen Organisationen akkreditiert und arbeitet mit Ausbildungs- und Gesundheitseinrichtungen auf der ganzen Welt eng zusammen. Durch seine themenorientierten Forschungsarbeiten hat das INSP die staatlichen Politik in Mexiko insbesondere in den Bereichen Tabak, Milchnanreicherung und Denguefieber sowie bei anderen Schwerpunkten der Public Health maßgeblich beeinflusst. Das Institut verbessert die Volksgesundheit durch Förderung der gesundheitlichen Chancengleichheit, Stärkung der Gesundheitssysteme, Ausbildung des Gesundheitspersonals und Durchführung von Forschungs- und Dienstleistungsprojekten in Mexiko, Nord- und Südamerika und auf der ganzen Welt.

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tinues throughout the academic programme, and is ultimately incorporated into the thesis project required for graduation.

The INSP has developed multiple educational formats to accommodate the personal and professional demands of health workers who seek training. Full-time programmes are offered at the Cuernavaca campus. The executive Master of Public Health programme uses a blended learning format that allows students to complete online activities during the week and participate in classroom-based sessions on Fridays and Saturdays at the Mexico City Campus. The INSP also offers the Master of Public Health in an online format for working professionals who are unable to participate in classroom-based activities due to time constraints and/or location. The executive and online Master of Public Health programme have the same structure, content, and credits as the fulltime programme.

The pedagogical model of the INSP is strongly focused on competency-based education. All academic programmes strongly encourage the active participa-

tion of students by using didactic techniques that are learning-centered rather than teaching-centered. This provides students with a more relevant and proactive role in the educational process. Courses incorporate didactic material based on case studies, problems and projects, thereby strengthening the development of competencies. This innovative pedagogical model enables health professionals to develop the competencies they need to respond to health challenges.

Additionally, the Institute contributes to developing the workforce's competencies by offering a wide range of continuing education courses, many of which are implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Health and state-level health departments. The continuing education programme includes classroom-based programmes at INSP campuses as well as online and blended formats for in-service professionals across the country. In the past 10 years, these educational formats have allowed the Institute to strengthen the public health workforce by training over 62,000 professionals.

In September 2010, the INSP launched its virtual campus (www.inspvirtual.mx), an online academic environment designed to enrich learning opportunities using interactive applications and information and communications technologies. The site aims to provide the INSP community with the most up-to-date information regarding academic programmes and activities, improve academic services and management using automated systems, and promote virtual education and the open, collaborative construction of knowledge. Since its launch, the site has had almost 40,000 hits and become linked to the Virtual Public Health Campus (<http://portal.campusvirtualesp.org>) and the Virtual Health Library (<http://regional.bvsalud.org>) of the Pan American Health Organization, among other organisations and networks, increasing its ability to promote collaborative information sharing and knowledge creation among public health experts across Americas.

The INSP received accreditation with the National Council on Science and Technology in 1994 and submits all new academic programs for official approval. The INSP received accreditation with the Council for Education in Public Health in 2006 – making it the only institution with this accreditation outside the US – and with tropEd, a network of higher education institutions in international health, in 2008.

In addition to its academic programmes, the INSP is recognised for its ability to influence public policies through mission-oriented research. The INSP's research mission is to improve population health through the production, dissemination, and implementation of scientific knowledge about health conditions and organised social responses, based on disciplines and methods in public health. The INSP works closely with the Federal Ministry of Health to improve population health by conducting national health surveys, providing support for epidemiological monitoring of health problems, and performing diagnostic services for diverse community groups. Importantly, the INSP's



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strategic objectives are established in accordance with the National Development Program, as presented in the National Health Program 2007–2012. The INSP has supported the development of over 500 research and service projects in the last four years (2007–2010) and 290 projects are in progress.⁴ In order to promote evidence-based research in the field of public health, the INSP publishes the open access journal, *Salud Pública de México* (<http://bvs.insp.mx/rsp/inicio/>). Also, the institutional bulletin and multimedia resources about INSP research and activities are available free of cost via the institutional website (www.insp.mx/comunicacion-y-divulgacion-de-la-ciencia.html).

INSP research has played a key role in the development of public policies in Mexico, as national health survey results and health programmes evaluations have provided essential information for decision-making in the implementation of social programmes. For example, in 1999, the National Nutrition Survey found a large proportion of children with iron deficiency anaemia.⁵ After the results were presented to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development, recommendations were made to implement or modify existing programmes to improve the iron status of Mexican children. A federal programme that distributed subsidised milk at low cost to low income households was used as a vehicle for improving iron status, as the milk was fortified with iron and other micronutrients. Evaluations have demonstrated that the programme has helped to reduce anaemia.⁶

Additionally, the INSP has developed research to evaluate the impact of public policies against tobacco

use on adult smokers in Mexico. The objective of the research was to evaluate the psychosocial and behavioral impact of public policies promoted by the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on Mexican smokers. The initiative focused on the effects of increased taxes on tobacco sales, packaging regulations regarding the size and format of cigarette warnings, and the prohibition of smoking in public and work areas.⁷ As a result, INSP research and advocacy played an important role in shaping the recently approved Mexican tobacco control legislation, titled the General Tobacco Control Law and the Protection Act for Non-Smokers in Mexico City.⁸

The INSP works to enhance academic opportunities and strengthen its role in improving health services and policy advocacy in Mexico and around the world. It is an active member of the Association of Schools of Public Health (US) and became a member of the Association of Schools of Public Health of the European Region (ASPHER) in 2010. The INSP has worked with many partners in the Americas on capacity building projects and has played an important role in the Mesoamerican Institute of Public Health (www.imesoamericano.org/), which is a regional initiative to strengthen national health systems and improve access to health services.

The INSP collaborates closely with international institutions for academic exchange. Currently, the Institute has students from around the world, in particular from Latin America, and is dedicated to hosting international students and finding opportunities for Mexican students to study abroad. All international students who are accepted to an academic programme at the



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INSP will receive a scholarship from the Mexican government. Students can also apply for funding through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.sre.gob.mx/) or the Mexican embassy in their country of residence. Because it is a member institution of the tropEd network, students can complete courses at the INSP as part of the Masters Programme in International Health (<http://erasmusmundus.troped.org>). Also, there are many possibilities for doctorate students to work with INSP research teams. The Institute works with European institutions – in particular those affiliated with ASPHER – to ensure that course credits are compatible with the European credit transfer system and promote student exchange.

In the future, the INSP seeks to improve population health by incorporating a global health focus across its training, research and services activities. The Institute aims to develop new educational strategies to train current and future health professionals to improve health systems and respond to twenty-first challenges. Through these actions, the Institute aims to promote health equity in Mexico and around the world. ■

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