

## **Careers for Dietitians in Public Health Nutrition**

### **Kathy McConell**

*Currently, I am the Coordinator of the Food Alliance, a newly created advocacy body pursuing evidence-informed food policy and regulatory reform to enable sustainable food security and healthy eating. Past roles include State Public Health Nutritionist, Senior Project Manager and Senior Policy Advisor at the Department of Health, strengthening public health nutrition in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine at Monash University, Senior Dietitian at the International Diabetes Institute and Caulfield Community Health Centre. In addition, I worked as a Clinical Dietitian in private practice and developed and taught nutrition related courses at tertiary institutions.*

### **Interview**

#### **What does a Public Health Nutritionist do?**

Public Health Nutritionists aim to enhance population nutritional health by creating supportive environments in which to make behaviour change. This work includes the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, monitoring and surveillance systems, social marketing campaigns and workforce development.

#### **Where do Public Health Nutritionists work?**

Work can be found in local, state and national government, community and non-government organisations, food industry, academic institutions and as private consultants.

#### **What experience and qualifications do you need to work in public health?**

Depending on the type of work, I'd suggest you need a postgraduate degree in a health related field as a minimum. However, law, communications and economics for example can nicely complement a health degree depending on your goals.

#### **What are the highlights of working in public health?**

I find that there is opportunity to continually learn and be challenged by experts in lateral fields. For example, broadening public health nutrition to address environmental sustainability opens my eyes to the world of environmental science and the vast opportunities that the food system has to contribute to addressing climate change. I've been fortunate to be part of system wide change including developing innovative approaches to address obesity, to creating social marketing and monitoring systems that aim to change cultural perceptions and provide unique data. Also I have witnessed paradigm shifts in public health nutrition thinking. Public health work aims to create supportive environments rather than put the responsibility solely on individuals.

#### **Advice for students who are interested in public health**

I would suggest talking and witnessing as many different conversations and experiences amongst a wide variety of people working in different sectors to better understand the possibilities of future work. Ask as many questions along the way as possible.