



## **MENTORING PROGRAM REPORT 2010**

### **PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA (SA BRANCH) AND THE AUSTRALIAN HEALTH PROMOTION ASSOCIATION (SA BRANCH)**

#### **BACKGROUND**

It was another successful year for the South Australian branches of the Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA) and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) annual mentoring program. This year there was a higher number of applications from tertiary students, early career professionals and career transition or professional development. These mentees were paired with experienced professionals working in various roles in the fields of health promotion and public health. The aim of the program is to provide mentees with the opportunity to receive guidance regarding career opportunities, be provided with information and advice, build health promotion and public health networks and to draw on the experience of their mentor.

An introductory session was held on 9 September 2010, providing an opportunity for pairs to meet face to face, learn more about what the program involves and network with other participants. The program concluded in late November 2010 with an informal celebration event to share experiences and provide another networking opportunity.

In 2010 there was a record number of applications. 28 mentees and mentors participated in the program (56 participants in total), compared to 17 mentees and mentors in 2009.

Of the 28 mentees, eight identified as tertiary students, 11 early career, eight career transition and one professional development. Of these, one mentee and two mentors were from the Northern Territory (NT) Branch of AHPA which is the first time in this program that a partnership has been formed with another state.

Mentors represented a variety of public health and health promotion areas across government and non-government and academic institutions. These included research, policy, evaluation, dietetics, men's health, oral health, nursing, psychology, mental health and Aboriginal health. Pairs were matched as close as possible to mentees' interests.

There were a variety of objectives that each participant sought to meet and they have been divided below into their career levels. The mentee seeking professional development aimed to gain an understanding of policy and legislative options for health promotion and public health. In addition, they sought knowledge about how to secure public and political support for adopting policies and enacting legislation and engaging non-government agencies were amongst other objectives.

#### **Students**

Common objectives identified by students comprised of the following:

- Discuss further study options in Public Health and Health Promotion in SA
- Discuss and list employment/ volunteer/ career options
- Discuss job applications and interview skills on how to increase employment opportunities
- Learn about networking and relationship building through exchange of ideas and discussions
- List opportunities for professional development
- Enhance understanding of the health sector specific in relation to health promotion and prevention.

## **Early Career**

Common objectives identified by those early in their career comprised of the following:

- Increase understanding of employment opportunities in the Public Health and Health Promotion workforce both rural and metro.
- Gain advice and insight regarding career pathways and options within South Australia, particularly non-government agencies and community health positions.
- Discuss and evaluate resume and interview tips.
- Broaden knowledge of public health and health promotion; learning through conferences/ journals/ associations/ networking opportunities.
- Alternative ways to get experience and exposure outside of workplace.
- Identify potential professional development/networking opportunities and study options.

## **Career Transition**

Common objectives identified by those transitioning into health promotion or public health comprised of the following:

- Gain further understanding of career pathways and options in health, possible employers, including clarifying a career vision,
- Get guidance in study and how to choose the topics for the research
- Improve public health and health promotion networks in International and Indigenous health
- Develop a two-way professional relationship where research interests and information can be shared.
- Gain an understanding of the traits and skills necessary for a successful career transition.
- Increase my knowledge of project management, planning, structure and evaluation techniques.
- Advice on writing for publication.

## **DISCUSSION**

Participants were asked to provide feedback after the introductory session held for all participants on 9 September 2010. Feedback was received from 17 of the 40 attendees at the introductory session. 88% of respondents reported that the session helped to clarify their role as either a mentee or mentor. Participants commented that it was a great way to meet people and mingle with other participants. Other comments indicated that it is a successful program and well organised by the two associations. All respondents said that they would find it useful to attend a celebration event in November at the conclusion of the program and were asked to indicate preferred times for the event. This highlighted the difficulty of finding a time that was suitable for everyone. Based on the majority of responses, it was decided to hold an event on the 23 November after student exams had finished, for an informal gathering at the end of the day (1 hour duration). This was attended by under half of participants. Positive verbal feedback was received by attendees that it was a good to have another opportunity to network with their partner and others involved the program and share their experiences.

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the completion of the program. Of the 56 participants, 40 provided feedback (20 mentees and 20 mentors). On average most mentees met with their mentors two times. The most common form of communication between mentors and mentees was via email while six mentees contacted their mentor via phone.

The feedback received from mentors was positive, with 17 mentors stating that they would be happy to participate again and had found it fulfilling. Those who did not find it a fulfilling experience felt it would be beneficial if the program was able to allow a longer timeframe for learning and to build a relationship with their mentee to fully meet their needs. All but one mentor felt that they had the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to assist their mentee to fulfil their objectives (one mentor did not feel that their skills were appropriate as they were still an early career practitioner and recent graduate). Another mentor was unsure whether they had the appropriate skills as their mentee was not clear on what

assistance they required). The vast majority of mentors thought that their interaction with their mentee had facilitated the completion of their mentees' objectives, despite the short timeframe many pairs agreed to continue the mentoring beyond November.

Nine mentees found the program very useful while eight found the program somewhat useful, two were neutral and only one found the program not particularly useful. Mentees were also asked if their objectives set at the beginning of the program have been fully met, and from the feedback it was clear that almost all objectives were fully met. While those that indicated that some of their objectives had not yet been met, they stated that they would continue their contact with their mentors after the program had finished.

Each mentee was asked whether they found their mentor had appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to enable successful fulfilment their objectives. This is an important factor in contributing to the overall success of the program. All twenty of the twenty-one mentees agree that their mentors were completely appropriate. In particular mentees made note to their mentors having similar interests or having been on a 'similar journey'. The knowledge and experience of the mentors was highly regarded and allowed mentors to provide useful contacts and networking opportunities to mentees. One participant commented that their mentor:

*'gave me great insight into how a career in health promotion can develop including how health promotion methods have progressed over my mentor's own career. They helped me recognise the benefits of studying public health in recent times and understanding contemporary health promotion theory, principles and practices.'*

All mentees agreed that their interaction with their mentor facilitated the successful completion of their objectives. The building of relationships allows the fulfilling of objectives to be ongoing. Talking to their mentors made some participants more confident in their own abilities, in particular as stated by three mentees applying for jobs. The interaction also allowed the mentees to explore their areas of interest and progress objectives.

It is important that mentees meet up with their mentors. Of the participants many of the participants had trouble organising to meet up due to busy schedules, travel commitments, university workloads and exams. One mentee said that having management support was extremely beneficial and allowed them to be more flexible when arranging a meeting time.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There was generally positive feedback given by mentors that the program was well administered and well structured and it was not overwhelming for participants. Among those mentors who provided suggestions, nearly all indicated that the timeframe of the program could be longer such as 6-12 months to enable time for objectives to be achieved. The program could start earlier in the year providing more opportunities for pairs to meet and follow up. One mentor commented that in order to provide value to someone, they need a lot more time to become clear about and then modify their objectives. It was suggested that mentees identify their objectives clearly, including their experience as part of the application process and then provide the right time frame for them to achieve their objectives. Part of the rigour is about setting objectives and understanding their achievability. Although many mentors found the program was not long enough, many pairs advised that they would continue their relationship beyond November which is what the program committee anticipated and encouraged from the beginning, acknowledging that many previous participants have done so and it has been successful for them.

Similar to mentors, it was suggested by mentees that the program be extended to 6-12 months. It was also recommended that it commence earlier in the year or mid year so that it does not coincide with exam preparation. Other suggestions included enabling mentees to gain practical industry experience in the program and the possibility to meet with more than one mentor who is also closely matched to their needs for example at a general session with all participants.

The mentoring program has again proved popular with an increase in mentees and with participants reporting a positive experience, and a successful introduction and celebration event. It is recommended that the 2011 program extend to 6 months with a minimum of 6 contacts, to commence in May or June. It is also recommended that the SA branches of AHPA and PHAA continue the partnership with the AHPA NT Branch in delivering this program.