

TUFH Academies: Advancing Health Equity Through Education

By: Karessa Govender*, William Burdick*

*Social Accountability Manager, The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH)

*Vice Secretary-General, The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH)

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Abstract

The Network: TUFH has recently established a global online learning program for health workers, policymakers, students, and faculty to advance health equity globally. TUFH Academy topics include Social Innovations in Health Professions Education, Social Accountability in Health Professions Education, Interprofessional Education and Team-Based Care, Indigenous Health, Transformative Leadership in Health Professions Education, Social Determinants of Health, Innovative Cities and Health, and Communication. The goals and student feedback from a representative course are described. An institutional membership model and sliding scale fee structure are intended to strengthen sustainability. Courses draw participants and faculty from all parts of the world, allowing change-makers to connect, learn from each other's experiences, build relationships, and ultimately develop a global health-equity community.

Introduction

A goal of The Network: Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) is promoting health equity and a new program, the TUFH Academies, has been introduced to achieve that goal. The TUFH Academies are online courses oriented towards students, faculty, policymakers, and others in fields connected to health and wellness. Online courses, used extensively during the Covid-19 pandemic, allow a global organization like TUFH to bring experts to a wider audience and connect participants. Launched in 2021, TUFH Academies have addressed social determinants of health, communication, policy development and advocacy, the health and well-being of indigenous people, active learning, and various other topics. One component of the TUFH Academies is the International Student Training and Exchange Program (iSTEP) with three courses that grant university course credits. This report describes the extent of the TUFH Academies' reach and participants' feedback.

The Development of the TUFH Academies

The creation of the TUFH Academies was motivated by the articulation of the TUFH 2021-2024 strategic plan which endorsed "the need to support and connect local changemakers by providing local leaders with tools that translate policy and knowledge to action and optimise local assets." Initially, through a series of symposia, TUFH engaged speakers from those events and other experts to create courses to advance that goal. Two strategies facilitated course development: collaboration with academic institutions, and recruitment of a group of 'fellows' interested in learning how to develop courses while assisting in the process.

In the first round of development, TUFH collaborated with the University of Limerick and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University. 20 fellows were selected from a pool of over 100 applicants to work with course leaders. Six Academy courses and three iSTEP courses were presented in the 2021-22 cycle [Table 1], with 518 registered students. To promote access to the TUFH Academy courses, TUFH provided an affordable fee structure for participants that is informed by World Bank classifications of countries. TUFH members receive a further discounted fee and iSTEP courses are free to students of TUFH member institutions.

Table 1: TUFH Academies delivered in 2021 and the first half of 2022

2021-2022	
TUFH Academies	
Social Innovations in Health Professions Education	Social Accountability in Health Professions Education
Interprofessional Education and Team-Based Care	Indigenous Health
Transformative Leadership in Health Professions Education	
iSTEP	
Social Determinants of Health	Innovative Cities and Health
Communication	

TUFH Academy courses are typically presented in six weekly-held live online sessions. These contact sessions are supplemented with recordings and other resource materials available through the TUFH community website. iSTEP courses use a learning management system for access to resources and a discussion board and present eight live sessions once a month, encompassing six modules plus an opening and closing session. The live sessions are theory-oriented and are supplemented with pre-readings and regular assignments. In the case of the TUFH Academy courses, they culminate in a final project applied to participants' local environment and community. Additionally, translated asynchronous selected TUFH Academies are offered on ScholarRx and PAHO's Public Health Virtual Academy. The asynchronous delivery of these Academies is part of our scaling impact strategy to ensure content is available globally.

Results

An example of one of our TUFH Academies is the recent Transformative Leadership in Health Professions Education course which drew participants from Uganda, Morocco, India, South Africa, Italy, Burma, Nigeria, United Arab Emirates, and Sudan. The course was facilitated by a senior lecturer from Ireland and a professor from the Philippines. Course organizers focused the course on leadership theories and their application to health professions education, with an emphasis on change management. In addition to modules on leading change in medical education, the course included modules on systems thinking, intersectoral collaboration, and community engagement. Students created a personal leadership development plan to address health inequities in their region/community as a capstone project.

Student feedback from the course, consistent with feedback from all the TUFH Academy courses, was positive. A representative comment stated, *“The course [...] equips medical personnel with leadership skills and it was great sharing knowledge with people from different countries and regions.”*

Discussion

This year, our TUFH 2022 fellows enhanced the existing TUFH Academies and created new TUFH Academies. Our fellows were selected from 21 countries and represent all WHO regions. Courses in the next cycle include Social Innovations and Entrepreneurship in Health Professions Education, Interprofessional Education and Team-Based Care, Social Behaviour in Policy Design, Successful Organizational Change, Systems Approach to Healthy Ageing in LMICS, Indigenous Health, Active Learning, Introduction to Womens' Health, Indigenous Health and Appreciative inquiry that supports resilience. Details are available on the TUFH website (www.thenetworktufh.org) and in Table 2.

Table 2: TUFH Academies which will be delivered between September 2022 and April 2023

2022	
Social Innovations and Entrepreneurship in Health Professions Education Sep - Oct 2022	Interprofessional Education and Team-Based Care Oct – Nov 2022
Social behaviour in policy design Oct - Nov 2022	
2023	
Successful Organisational Change Jan – Feb 2023	Systems Approach to Healthy Ageing in LMICs Jan – Feb 2023
Active Learning and Development of Learner Communities Jan - Feb 2023	Indigenous Health March – April 2023
Introduction to Womens' Health March - April 2023	Appreciative inquiry that supports resilience March – April 2023

Conclusion

TUFH Academies are a range of health-equity courses that are delivered online in a synchronous or asynchronous fashion. They are designed for all those who are working towards reducing health inequalities and increasing health equity across the globe. Meeting current and future health needs requires that change-makers and healthcare workers have a skill set that crosses sectors to include social, environmental, and technical content plus interpersonal and leadership skills to effect change. Change-makers must be able to identify vulnerable populations and the services they need and must be well versed in the wide range of factors that influence health and how they can be modified. They must also be comfortable influencing policy processes to support health equity. The TUFH Academies address these themes.

This diversity of people and regions is evident in the quality of the TUFH Academies produced. We partnered our fellows with leading content experts who supported their development of the curriculum. Through these partnerships, our fellows were able to develop Academies that will expose participants to the global context while still strengthening their ability to reflect on and affect change locally.

The journey toward health equity will require reforms in practice and health professions education. To achieve this, our TUFH Academies are geared toward those involved in health professions education as well as those in clinical practice. The diversity of participants and facilitators encapsulates the concept of the global classroom. This approach allows change-makers from different parts of the world to connect, learn from each other's experiences, build relationships, and ultimately develop a community of health-equity change-makers.