

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Pekka Puska

Director General
National Public Health Institute
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Professor Pekka Puska (M.D., Ph.D., M.Pol.Sc.) is currently the Director General of the National Public Health Institute of Finland (KTL). In this position he has a central role in Finnish public health work and health policy making.



KTL is a comprehensive national public health institute under Ministry of Health in Finland. The institute employs some one thousand persons and covers a broad range of health issues from chronic diseases, nutrition and health behaviours to infectious diseases, vaccination programmes, environmental health and emergency preparedness. KTL has major public health functions and various surveillance tasks. It carries out high level research and is engaged in numerous international activities.

Prior to his present position, Professor Puska served as Director for Non-communicable Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva from 2001 to 2003. His previous work in Finland and worldwide gave him a solid background when he helped the WHO to upgrade its response to the rapid increase of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in many parts of the world.

In 2002, the 55th World Health Assembly requested the WHO's Director-General to prepare a Global Strategy on diet and physical activity as well as to support an annual Move for Health Day as a continuation of the successful World Health Day 2002. Professor Puska's Department was at the focal point of these activities that culminated in the adoption of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health by the World Health Assembly in 2004. The Department also coordinated the global Mega Country Health Promotion Network as well as the regional NCD prevention networks linked by a WHO Global Forum on NCD Prevention and Control. Other programmes at the WHO dealt, for example, with school health, ageing, oral health, etc.

Before joining the WHO, professor Puska served KTL as Director of the Department of Epidemiology and Health Promotion. For 25 years he acted

as the Director and Principal Investigator of the North Karelia Project which is widely seen as a model for successful population based prevention of cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases. Within 25 years, annual heart disease mortality about an 80% decline among the working age population.

Professor Puska has been involved in a number of scientific, expert and public health functions internationally. He has participated in WHO's expert work, international consultations, multinational research projects during more than three decades. He has developed and directed the global Quit and Win smoking cessation campaign that concerns some one hundred countries and is coordinated by KTL in collaboration with WHO.

Professor Puska chaired the Scientific Committee of the World Health Education Conference in Helsinki in 1991, and the International Steering Committee of the 12th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, held in Helsinki, Finland in 2003. Professor Puska has also represented Finland in the Governing Council of the WHO International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC) since 2004. Currently he chairs the Organizing Committee of the International Conference of Diabetes Prevention, to be held in Helsinki in 2008.

Professor Puska is the Vice-President of the newly established International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI). The association links the national public health institutes of the world and helps countries to establish or develop their institutes to strengthen the national public health infrastructure.

Professor Puska has served as a Member of the National Parliament of Finland, as well as the Elector of the President of the Republic. In addition, he has had numerous major national governmental and non-governmental positions and assignments in the field of public health.

Professor Puska's scientific merits include some 500 publications in the fields of epidemiology, preventive medicine, health promotion and public health. He holds degrees in medicine and political science and a PhD in epidemiology and public health. He holds several honorary titles including Honorary Doctorate at St. Andrew's University (Scotland) and Academician of Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and has received the WHO's annual Health Education Award in 1990, the WHO Tobacco Free World Award in 1999 and the Nordic Award for Public Health in 2005.