

Global Investigation Of Veterinary Field Epidemiology Training Programs, 2022

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Please note that I am resubmitting this abstract with a minor revision. I was unable to present in 2023 due to unforeseen circumstances.

Field epidemiology training programs (FETPs) are workplace-based programs which emphasise “learning through doing”. A proven approach for strengthening the public health system, the model is increasingly adopted for training veterinary epidemiologists. Typically hosted within a veterinary authority, trainees learn through mentorship and service to solve real world problems.

Funded by the 2019 Dr Dorothea Sandars Churchill Fellowship, the author, during 2022, met with veterinary and One Health FETP staff, advisors, trainees and graduates across Asia, Africa, Europe and North America to identify the potential benefits of a veterinary FETP for Australia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and field observations and analysed thematically.

Benefits were found to be considerable for both host organisations and participants. Host organisations reported that their program had strengthened the performance of surveillance systems, increased the number and quality of outbreak investigations, and improved the evidence-base for decision-making and action. Participants reported improved confidence, job satisfaction and better networks. Factors identified as enabling success included tailoring programs to government priorities, ensuring trainee projects contribute to identified priorities and leveraging the program to strengthen epidemiology capacity across the workforce.

Identified benefits of a veterinary FETP could address Australian biosecurity priorities through upskilling the biosecurity workforce, creating stronger networks, improving preparedness and response to biosecurity threats, and supporting more timely and informed decision-making. If a veterinary FETP is started, it should be designed for Australia’s unique context: increasing biosecurity threats, varied production industries, a transitioning and large private workforce, and a decentralised veterinary authority.

1. Schaffner W, LaForce FM. Training field epidemiologists: Alexander D. Langmuir and the Epidemic Intelligence Service. *Am J Epidemiol* 1996;144.
2. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. National Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032. 2022. Available at: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-biosecurity-strategy.pdf>. Accessed 22 March 2023.