



# LEPH 2023: Together again towards resilient communities

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The Global Law Enforcement and Public Health Association is convening its 2023 European Regional Conference on Law Enforcement and Public Health in Umea, Sweden, May 21–24, 2023. As per the usual flavour of the conference, the program is multi-focused, and multi-disciplinary. It is with unbridled enthusiasm that we anticipate the usual mix of scholar- and practitioner-led discussions, focused on the importance of collaborative partnerships, and their contribution to the prevention and amelioration of persistent challenges to personal and social safety and well-being.

This year, the conference headline is *Together towards resilient communities*. Its core aims are to help promote healthy lives and well-being leading to peaceful and inclusive societies through an integrated approach to law enforcement and public health. One key goal for the conference and its attendees is to help build police–public health partnerships that are effective, accountable, and inclusive. These goals are aligned to the Rio+20 Conference, and its Sustainable Development Goals to overcome social marginalization and discrimination (particularly SDG3 – good health and well-being, and SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institutions: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>).

According to the conference website (<https://leph2023.umea.com/themes>),

The achievement of effective public health outcomes is often the result of intersecting law enforcement and public health policy that underpins integrated practice. Law enforcement, especially through the activities of police forces, has a crucial but often unacknowledged role in the protection and promotion of public health. This means that there is an inadequate approach to research and investigation of ways in which law enforcement can be most effectively engaged and be most effective in carrying out their public health role.

One key objective for the World Health Organisation is Global Health Security, defined as “the activities required, both proactive and reactive, to minimize the danger and impact of acute public health events that endanger people’s health across geographical regions and international boundaries.” This necessitates a combined effort across multiple government jurisdictions, not just public health organizations.

Past conferences developed the ideas of how the broader area of law enforcement (policing, prosecution, the courts and corrections) shares common space with public health in dealing with the symptoms of many underlying social issues. They brought to light the need for collaboration and bold and innovative leadership to overcome resistance or barriers toward common objectives.

The 2023 conference will continue to explore the substantive areas in which police–public health partnerships are important. Topics such as the prevention and response to mental health issues, first responders’ mental health and well-being, and emergency preparedness will be explored across several streams. Similarly, the organizational issues that are so crucial to making partnerships work will be addressed by some speakers, either by way of specific collaborative examples (how they work, or otherwise) or by way of more conceptual presentations. Some professions which have become key contributors to the advancement of the LEPH will also be a key feature of the conference (such as public prosecutors or police prosecutors, legal defenders, coroners, magistrates, and forensic nurses).

Some methodological approaches to LEPH problem-solving will also be prominently featured across the conference. Accordingly, trauma-informed policing practices will be discussed, as well as harm reduction initiatives, across topics such as childhood adverse experiences and early intervention; alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; and the legal and policing frameworks that apply to such issues.

Some of our conference contributors will also reflect on the creation of the science of LEPH, by analyzing case studies and presenting on methodological issues. As such, there will be several themes on education, with global educators discussing new trends, opportunities, and obstacles. These sessions will aim to bridge some of the gaps across fields and provide insight into emerging trends in establishing shared terminologies (and sometimes collaborative policies) across the professions.

As is the case for all LEPH conferences, marginalized communities are an important priority theme of LEPH2023. Marginalization is the enemy of security and health. Too often around the world, police have, often unwittingly, been agents of marginalization. Inclusive policing works to overcome marginalization by according equal or greater attention and

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support to populations at increased risk because of exclusion and unequal access to justice. Some communities are particularly at risk of exploitation and harm. Accordingly, major marginalization and vulnerability themes will cover topics such as child protection, child exploitation, neurocognitive disorders and barriers to communication (including issues such as acquired brain injury, epilepsy), female genital mutilation, gender-based and domestic violence, racial and ethnic disparities in access to care and health (and the over-representation of vulnerable groups in the justice system, particularly in prisons and the public health role they now play).

Public health is an active partner in crime prevention as well as a range of other complex social issues, such as mental health, infectious diseases, road trauma, community and domestic violence (with keynote presentations and several sessions on the topics of domestic violence and intimate Partner violence), alcohol and drugs, and disaster management. As well as providing state-of-the-art updates from national and international experts in both police and public health, LEPH2023 will bring together experience and examples of successful partnership initiatives and hear of lived experiences from the widest range of settings.

The LEPH2023 conference bears an overall flavour of community resilience and presents marginalization and disadvantage as social enemies of security and health. Historically, marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and groups in societies have not enjoyed the same levels of care and protection, and this remains particularly prevalent in certain countries of the world where the full gamut of human rights are not valued or recognized. Furthermore, a resurgence of an ill-advised “war” rhetoric towards social groups in some parts of the world is likely to increase the risk of these social groups being further marginalized and isolated from justice and health services, especially in low socio-economic areas. It is impossible to have community resilience where some community members are excluded or are not afforded the same protections. Law enforcement and public health agencies are far more likely to have regular contact with marginalized persons; yet those same persons are far more unlikely to have equal access to preventive health care. Public health and law enforcement both have a role to play in overcoming such deeply entrenched disadvantages.

Global research is crucially needed in all matters mentioned here. However, there are many low- and middle-income countries that do not have the capacity to conduct research or implement sustainable plans to overcome their own pressing issues, such as famine, pandemics, lack of education or even

access to clean water. Even in developed countries, health systems are strained, as are broad law enforcement systems. While there is need to strengthen health systems globally, finding a holistic approach to strengthen these systems and system partnerships is becoming urgent.

The LEPH2023 conference will provide much needed opportunities to highlight some of the strong collaborations that exist in Sweden and Europe, such as the engagement of the Polisförbundet, the Swedish police union, in furthering relationships with public health. The Swedish Police Union emphasizes the importance the Swedish police’s role in people’s safety and a democratic and legally secure society. The Union advocates for the improvement of basic police officer training towards an academic bachelor’s degree to strengthen the police profession in relation to other professions. In addition, an academic degree gives police officers access to further academic studies in Sweden as well as abroad. This also means that the path to research is facilitated and that those police officers who want to engage in applied research in police work and in policing partnerships have greater opportunities to do so.

The LEPH2023 conference is an evolution of the major themes of past conferences, leading naturally to developing the broad objective of building community resilience. With an emphasis on the idea of “Together,” we will build resilient communities. Collaborative approaches move us towards developing and advancing the concepts of community health and well-being, and sees law enforcement and public health contributing to global health security. Health Security should be viewed as an overarching LEPH objective, and the need to realize this objective has never been more pressing. Conferences such as the LEPH conferences need to explore and share promising practices and bring public and private sectors together in a collaborative effort. LEPH2023 does just that.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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