

# WHO Centre for Health Development Kobe, Japan 1995-2020

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# Foreword



This brochure is a snapshot of the work and contributions over the past 25 years of the WHO Centre for Health Development (WHO Kobe Centre – WKC) based in Kobe, Japan. We have selected highlights and events that describe our contributions towards health development globally, and locally where we are hosted. The scope of the Centre’s research has spanned settings and systems, ageing and emergencies. WKC Directors over the years have strived to ensure that the work of the Centre is relevant and dynamic, able to adapt to changing circumstances.

The year 2020 began as we paid tribute to the people of Hyogo and Kobe to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in January, a tragic event in 1995 which did not deter the leadership of Hyogo Prefecture and Kobe City from their vision of creating a centre of global stature to contribute to international health.

Just a few months later, the world was gripped in a pandemic unprecedented in modern times. COVID-19 has tested the resilience of health systems around the globe and revealed how important health is to global security and health development. Our contributions to Japan and the local community are described further in this brochure, along with our local engagement programme to encourage young people considering global health careers and our research dissemination forums with communities in the Kansai region.

We also remember the first Director of WKC, Dr Andrzej Wojtczak, who passed away in May 2020. Dr Wojtczak, a Polish national, was instrumental in setting up the Centre, working from a room in Kobe Port Island’s Portopia Hotel to employ staff members.

He established a strong foundation for the Centre and helped to establish relationships with the local academic community. He was recognized for his contribution to health in Hyogo Prefecture at the annual awards announced by Governor Toshizo Ido in May 2008. His legacy continues to inform the work of the Centre, WHO and countries.

None of our work would have been possible without the generous and sustained support of the Kobe Group, comprising Hyogo Prefecture, Kobe City, Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Kobe Steel, Ltd, and the local community. We are thankful and indeed privileged to be based here and look forward to fulfilling our global mandate and the needs of the people of Hyogo and Kobe in the coming years.

**Dr Sarah Louise Barber**

Director  
WHO Centre for Health Development  
(WHO Kobe Centre)

# Message from the Kobe Group



I wish to express my sincere congratulations on the 25th anniversary of the WHO Centre for Health Development (WHO Kobe Centre - WKC).

Since experiencing the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Hyogo/Kobe has been striving to become a region that can contribute to the world as a global hub for health care and disaster management. It is therefore very encouraging that the WHO Kobe Centre, which was established as a global research centre under WHO Headquarters, is working in collaboration with academic institutions in the prefecture on research for health development locally and globally.

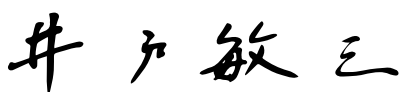
The WHO Kobe Centre has published numerous research articles and disseminated its achievements to local and global audiences through its website and various forums. In addition, the Centre has contributed to nurturing globally minded youth by organizing the 'WKC Forum High School Students Thinking Globally Day', an event where local high school students present their research projects and discuss international issues. On behalf of the Kobe Group, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr Sarah Barber, the current Director of the WHO Kobe Centre, to all the past Directors before her, and to all partners who have been involved in the research and development of the WHO Kobe Centre.

Countries and regions around the world are still under the threat of COVID-19. The world must work together to promote vaccination and develop treatments to overcome this crisis. Responding to the global spread of infectious diseases is one of the most immediate and most important challenges for humanity.

We must overcome the current pandemic and open up a new era, post-COVID-19. To this end, I hope that the WHO Kobe Centre, with its wealth of knowledge and networks, will demonstrate an even stronger leadership role. We anticipate cutting-edge research, development and innovation including in collaboration with the KOBE Biomedical Innovation Cluster, which boasts advanced science and technology infrastructure, most notably the world's best supercomputer named 'Fugaku'. We also look forward to continued research on public health measures in the context of urban population ageing.

There are many health challenges to overcome in the world besides COVID-19, such as coping with increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters and developing social systems in response to poverty and population ageing. Let us work together to realize a society where everyone can live in good health with safety and security.

I look forward to the further development of the WHO Kobe Centre and the success and good health of all those concerned.



**Hon. Toshizo Ido**

Chairman

Joint Cooperating Committee of  
the WHO Centre for Health Development

Governor

Hyogo Prefecture

# Introduction



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The WHO Centre for Health Development (**WHO Kobe Centre – WKC**) conducts research globally on the health systems response to the need for services in an ageing population, and health emergency and disaster

risk preparedness. As a hallmark of its work, the Centre focuses on anticipated emerging health and development issues, often not at the forefront of international or national attention.

Fully a part of WHO's Headquarters, WKC is an outposted office based in Kobe, Japan. Its research also addresses local health needs through local partnerships with universities in the Kansai area. This work benefits the local community through engagement at forums, participation in technical committees, and sharing of information. WKC is uniquely positioned to support the translation of social and technological innovations to and from Japan. It also plays a key role in sharing lessons learned from Hyogo Prefecture, Kobe City, and more broadly from Japan to other countries facing similar challenges.

A key to WKC's success is leveraging collaborative research and building on existing networks. WKC convenes stakeholders such as universities, research institutes, WHO Collaborating Centres, multi- and bilateral development agencies, regional economic organizations, civil society and communities to stimulate systematic research. WKC publishes its collaborative research with the scientific community in peer reviewed journals and WHO publications, and uses its networks of key partners to disseminate research findings globally and locally. The Centre has produced over 200 publications since 1995.



# Historical overview

WKC was established in 1995 following a proposal by the Governor of Hyogo Prefecture and the Mayor of Kobe City to WHO to contribute to international health work. Just a week before the WHO Executive Board met to discuss this generous offer, the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake struck Kobe and surrounding areas. Despite this devastating event, the offer remained firm and on 23 January 1995, WHO welcomed this great opportunity to contribute to health research.

The agreement was signed on **22 August 1995** by WHO's Director-General, followed by representatives of the Kobe Group, which are the Governor of Hyogo Prefecture, the Mayor of Kobe City, the Chairman of the Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the President of Kobe Steel, Ltd. WKC was officially inaugurated on **17 March 1996** in temporary offices at the Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry building on Port Island, Kobe. The **first Director of WKC was Dr Andrzej Wojtczak**, a Polish national, who sadly passed away in May 2020. He was instrumental in setting up the Centre, working from a room in Kobe Port Island's Portopia Hotel to employ staff members.

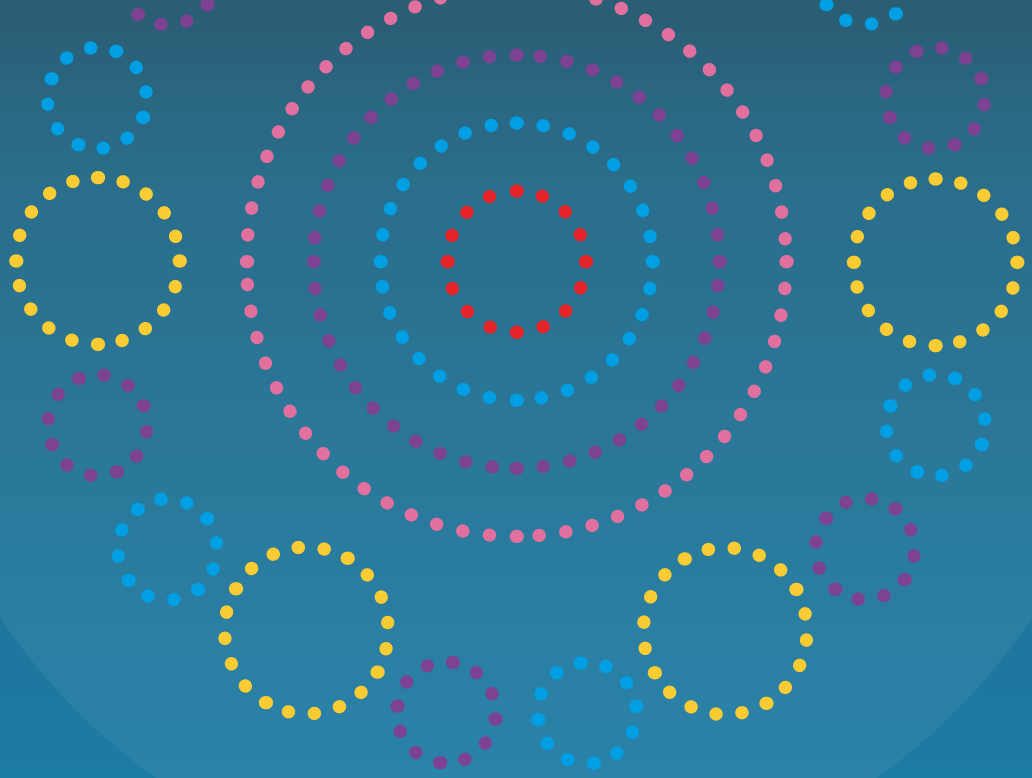
## 22 August 1995

The MOU was signed by WHO Director General



## 17 March 1996

Centre's official inauguration day – first director appointed:  
Dr Andrzej Wojtczak



**The first  
decade:  
1995 – 2005**

WKC's establishment in Kobe soon made the city a fixture on the global public health stage and a place of convergence for multidisciplinary discussions of international importance. To mark its inauguration, the Centre held a symposium on **"Urbanization: a global health challenge"** (18–20 March 1996) with global experts in various sectors voicing support for intersectoral research in relation to the complex health issues implicated in urbanization.

### March 1996

Symposium on  
*"Urbanization: a global health challenge"*

WKC held its second international symposium in Kobe on the second anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in January 1997 and explored the theme of **"Earthquakes and People's Health: vulnerability reduction, preparedness and rehabilitation"**. Recommendations from this meeting informed Kobe's reconstruction and disaster prevention plans.

### January 1997

International symposium  
in Kobe on the second  
anniversary of the Great  
Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake



© WHO/Yoshi Shimizu

On 23 April 1998, the Centre moved to the International Health Development Centre Building in HAT (Happy Active Town) Kobe, an area restored after the 1995 earthquake and a symbol of the city's renewal which accommodates many earthquake survivors and residents who lost homes and businesses.

### 23 April 1998

The Centre moved to  
the International Health  
Development Centre  
Building in HAT Kobe

WKC's early research was informed by pressing global health problems such as **people's health in urban settings**, and **ageing societies**. WHO was keen for the Centre to be a leader in promoting complex crosscutting research. A **new integrative approach** for analysing determinants of urban health was identified with the themes of lifecycle, equity, exclusion, cohesion and empowerment highlighting the inter-relationship of determinants. Health was seen as a dynamic process and health development was placed in the broader context of social and economic development.

## 1999

Dr Yuji Kawaguchi succeeded Dr Wojtczak

## October 1999

Global Symposium on Violence and Health

## November 1999

International conference on *"Making a difference to Tobacco and Health: Avoiding the Tobacco Epidemic in Women and Youth"*

**Dr Yuji Kawaguchi** succeeded Dr Wojtczak in 1999, introducing new themes such as **women and health** and **tobacco control**. Together with the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, WHO hosted an international conference in Kobe on ***"Making a difference to Tobacco and Health: Avoiding the Tobacco Epidemic in Women and Youth"***, from 15 – 18 November 1999. The meeting was a turning point in tobacco control by bringing together different groups concerned with tobacco and gender, and provided a platform for public health scientists and others to engage with leaders of local authorities, youth, women and human rights.

Violence and health was incorporated into WKC's urban health research programme, and the Centre hosted the **Global Symposium on Violence and Health** in October 1999 in Kobe, culminating in the Kobe Declaration on Violence and Health. The Symposium highlighted suicide and child abuse, which resulted in increased consultations on child abuse prevention and control in Japan, and contributed to the establishment of the Hyogo Institute for Traumatic Stress in March 2004.



In April 2000, the **inaugural International Meeting on Women and Health, entitled “Better Health and Welfare Systems: Women’s Perspectives”**, led to the Awaji Statement on *Women’s health – the surest road to quality of life for all*. The Third International Meeting on Women and Health held in Kobe in April 2002 produced the **Kobe Plan of Action for Women and Health**, a call for gender-based analysis in health, knowledge sharing and advocacy.

In January 2004, **Dr Wilfried Kreisel** was appointed Director of WKC who identified new priorities such as the **health emergency preparedness and response programme**. WKC drew lessons from the remarkable recovery and reconstruction of Hyogo and Kobe following the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake for its local, national and global work on health emergency preparedness and response. **Mental health** related to emergencies, urbanization and ageing populations was included in the research agenda, and other themes such as **climate change and health** and **health promotion and noncommunicable disease prevention and control initiatives** were added.

## April 2000

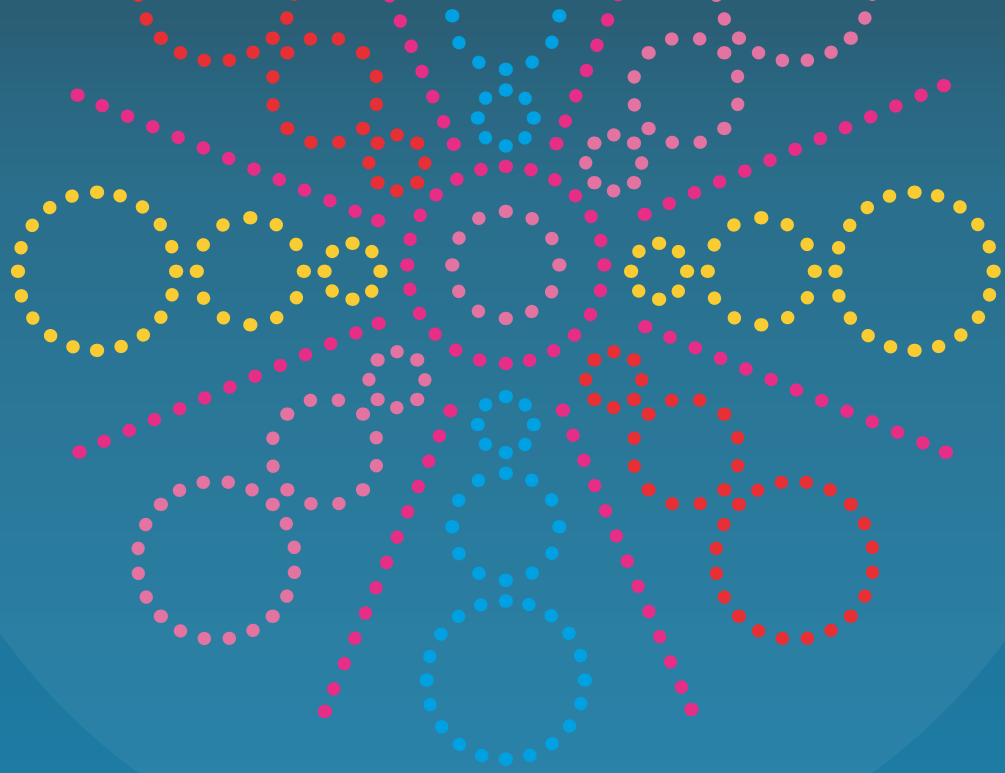
Inaugural International Meeting on Women and Health

## April 2002

Kobe Plan of Action for Women and Health

## January 2004

Dr Wilfried Kreisel appointed Director of WKC



# The second decade: 2006 – 2015

On 15 June 2005, dignitaries from WHO and the Kobe Group signed an extension to the Memorandum of Understanding for a further ten years, from 2006 to 2015. The agreement provided for generous funding and material support from the Kobe Group to continue the Centre's work.

A new research framework was developed to address key global trends that affect health development including ageing and demographic change, rapid urbanization, environmental change and technological innovation. WKC became the first WHO research centre devoted to obtaining evidence for decision-making on **the link between human health and the social, political, economic and physical environment to promote health equity**.

The Centre successfully **hosted the Knowledge Network on Urban Settings (KNUS)**, one of the nine research hubs of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health set up by WHO Director-General Dr Jong-Wook Lee in 2005. Kobe was one of six Healthy Urbanization Field Research Sites. For the next ten years, WKC effectively functioned as a global knowledge hub on urban health and equity.

In 2006, **Dr Soichiro Iwao**, formerly with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, became the Director and helped to cement WKC's place in the local community. In December that year, WKC jointly organized **"UN Day 2006: Japan at 50 in the UN – International Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Management Activities"** with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Kobe, United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), Hyogo International Association, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Hyogo and Hyogo Prefecture.

In 2008, **Dr Jacob Kumaresan** was appointed the Director of the Centre. Under his leadership, WKC firmly established itself as a global centre for excellence on urban health.

The completion of the **KNUS Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health** in May 2008 positioned WKC as a unique contributor to the global health agenda and was an important milestone in this area of work. Its inclusion in the final landmark report of the Commission in 2008 showed that beyond health care and individual lifestyles, the social environment fundamentally determines access to health services and influences lifestyles. The importance of a healthy social environment was later recognized and adopted by the Japanese government into their national health promotion strategy.

## 15 June 2005

Signing of an extension to the Memorandum of Understanding



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## 2006

Dr Soichiro Iwao became the Director

## December 2006

UN Day 2006: Japan at 50 in the UN – International Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Management Activities

## 2008

Dr Jacob Kumaresan was appointed the Director of the Centre

## May 2008

Completion of the KNUS Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health



## April 2010

WKC became the first office outside of Geneva to coordinate the global World Health Day campaign

In recognition of its status as a global authority on this matter, in 2010, for the first time in WHO's history, WKC became the first office outside of Geneva to **coordinate the global World Health Day campaign in April** with the theme "Urban Health Matters". This led to over 1500 cities worldwide to call for integrating health in urban policy. Calls to action included building cities that are accessible, age-friendly and resilient to emergencies and disasters.



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This was also the year that WKC published the **Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (Urban HEART)** for ministries of health and city level health officials to measure health inequities within and between cities. This unique and practical tool has been used in over 100 cities in 70 countries.

## Yumi Kimura

Associate Professor,  
Osaka University, Japan



Yumi worked as an intern on the Urban Health Metrics team from December 2008 – January 2009 and subsequently worked as a consultant while studying towards her PhD in Public Health at Kyoto University, focusing on diet and health among aged populations in communities in Asian countries.

*"It was an eye-opening experience for me to join the Urban HEART project at WKC which connects the research to the policy-making process. Following my post-doctoral studies, I started my career as an assistant professor at Osaka University."*

*The experience at WKC was very special for me. It had a great influence on my research and career to broaden perspectives and research interests. I occasionally return to WKC with my students, where the staff give lectures of their projects. I appreciate the network very much and hope to pass it on to future generations."*



Urban HEART also informed the development of a similar tool for assessing inequalities in health determinants and outcomes among older people in Japan (i.e. JAGES HEART; see box below) which was later adopted as the national benchmark system for evaluating the effectiveness of programmes to prevent older people's functional loss and resulting dependence on long-term care. The tool has also been adopted by Kobe City and dozens of other cities throughout Japan to assess their progress on promoting health and reducing health inequities.

## Local Engagement Partners



*Dr Katsunori Kondo, Professor  
Department of Social Preventive  
Medical Sciences, Center for  
Preventive Medical Sciences, Chiba  
University  
Department of Gerontological  
Evaluation, Center for Gerontology  
and Social Science, National Center  
for Geriatrics and Gerontology*

WKC partnered with the Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study (JAGES) which started in the 2000s under the leadership of **Dr Katsunori Kondo of Chiba University and the National Centre for Geriatrics and Gerontology**, and which later led to the establishment of the Japan Agency for Gerontological Evaluation Study. This study aims to understand "community

development where all people can be naturally (effortlessly) healthy", with a focus on older people's wellbeing, together with about 60 local governments nationwide, including those in the Kansai region such as Kobe City, Toyonaka City, Yao City and Ikoma City. Evidence obtained from JAGES has informed Japan's policies on health promotion and prevention of functional decline.

WKC introduced Kobe City to the project in 2010 which has since led to comprehensive cooperation. Several models of innovative programmes, such as the creation of *kayoinoba* (neighbourhood places dedicated for promoting social engagement among older people) have been integrated into national measures. The project has shown that the strength of people's social connections in the community and the characteristics of the community (social capital) that strengthen those connections are related to the extension of healthy life expectancy in older age and the reduction of health inequalities.

*"Our research activities were inspired by WHO's work on the social determinants of health, specifically WKC's Urban HEART. The knowledge we generate is made possible through joint research with local governments such as Kobe City. Through these collaborations, we have fostered new initiatives between researchers and local governments, as well as a mechanism for mutual learning between local governments," explains Dr Katsunori Kondo.*

*"For example, in Kobe City, our collaboration has expanded beyond our initial initiatives on older people to include a joint survey on the health of the working-age population. Furthermore, we are collaborating to utilize the survey results for the development of the city's new health promotion initiatives, including the 'my condition Kobe' project which is centered around a mobile application to promote both personal health and regional socioeconomic revitalization, and a data analysis project for the health management of welfare benefit recipients."*

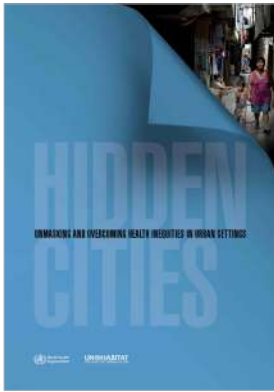
**Dr Naoki Kondo of Kyoto University**, one of the lead investigators of JAGES adds, "Owing to the WHO Kobe Centre's presence in Kobe, and our collaboration with them, we were able to disseminate information about our joint efforts with local governments, not just domestically, but also to the world. We were also given a great opportunity to scientifically consider how the lessons learned in Japan might be useful in various other country contexts around the world. We sincerely hope that the WHO Kobe Centre will continue to develop as a core institution that connects local communities in Japan to the global community in efforts toward creating a healthier world."



*Dr Naoki Kondo, Professor &  
Chair Department of Social  
Epidemiology  
Kyoto University School of Public  
Health*

## November 2010

Global Forum on Urbanization and Health. Publication of the 1st Global Report on Urbanization and Health



WKC's **Smoke Free Cities project** led to recommendations on 12 steps cities can take to make them smoke-free. This project contributed to local government policies on tobacco control worldwide. WKC also carried out a related field study in Kobe to inform the city's policies on this matter, as well as to support Hyogo Prefecture's pioneer effort to establish the strictest ordinance against second-hand smoke exposure in Japan at the time, even ahead of national legislation.



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In November 2010, Kobe hosted the **Global Forum on Urbanization and Health**. Attended by municipal leaders and national ministers from over 80 countries and multiple sectors, this led to the endorsement of the *Kobe Call to Action*, a commitment to policy action to reduce urban health inequities. This conference also celebrated WKC's recent publication of the **first joint WHO and UN-HABITAT global report on urbanization and health, *Hidden Cities: Unmasking and Overcoming Health Inequities in Urban Settings***.

## Nagisa Mori

Postdoctoral Scientist,  
International Agency  
for Research on Cancer  
(IARC), France



Nagisa, a graduate of Nara Women's University, interned at WKC on the Urban Health Governance team from August to November 2010 where she primarily worked on projects related to tobacco control.

*"It was indeed one of the biggest challenges for me to apply for an internship at an international organization. The experience at WKC gave me the courage to pursue my career as a nutritional epidemiologist."*

*"After completing my PhD at the University of Tokyo, I spent almost four years at the National Cancer Center Japan. In 2020, I relocated to WHO's specialized cancer agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France to work as a postdoctoral scientist. The people I met at WKC are all so precious to me and I am still in contact with many of them."*

In 2011, Kobe hosted two large regional meetings, the **Informal Meeting on Disaster Recovery for the Health Sector**, and the **First Regional Health Cluster Forum**, co-hosted with the WHO Regional Office in the Western Pacific.

2011 was a year marked by an earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incident in the Tohoku (Northeast) region of Japan, a triple threat unprecedented for any nation over such a short period of time. WHO including WKC provided support to Japan, the Tohoku region and the local community, issuing public health risk assessments and recommendations, and offering technical support including the translation and dissemination of information in Japanese which was much appreciated by key stakeholders in Japan. The new Director, **Dr Alex Ross**, joined WKC in October that year.

## 2011

Hosted the Informal Meeting on Disaster Recovery for the Health Sector, and the First Regional Health Cluster Forum



© WHO/Megumi Rosenberg

## 2011

Dr Alex Ross became the Director



## Keiko Yamada

Postdoctoral Fellow,  
Department of  
Psychology, McGill  
University, Canada

Keiko joined WKC from the Hyogo Prefecture governmental office and worked on tobacco control issues from October to December 2012.

*"After my time at WKC as an intern/volunteer, I graduated from Osaka University's Graduate School of Medicine (PhD) and worked at the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare as a technical officer. Now I work in the Department of Psychology at McGill University in Canada as a postdoctoral fellow.*

*My expertise is epidemiology and pain medicine, particularly psychosocial aspects of pain. I engage large population-based studies and clinical research of non-pharmacological intervention (e.g. behavioural therapy and rehabilitation programmes) for chronic pain patients. My experience in WKC was very impressive and valuable, which contributed to my career. Congratulations on your 25th anniversary."*

### December 2013

First WHO Global Forum on Innovation for Ageing Populations

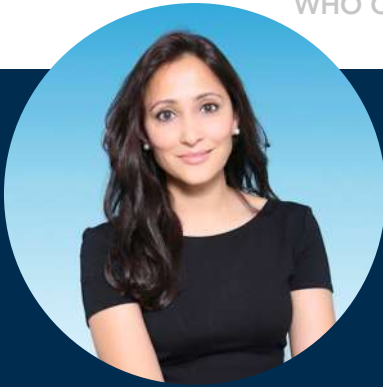
In 2012, WHO launched an **initiative to foster innovations for healthy ageing**. The first **WHO Global Forum on Innovation for Ageing Populations** was held in Kobe in December 2013. The meeting supported the linking of the ageing and disability communities under the umbrella of UHC, highlighted the need to document the preferences of older persons to inform product development and policy cycles, as well as new evaluation methods to support rapid collection of evidence for effective technologies and approaches.

### 2014

Series of WKC Forums on Innovation for Ageing Populations

In 2014, WKC hosted a series of **WKC Forums on Innovation for Ageing Populations** for the local community, which dealt with research trends such as innovations in pharmaceuticals, robotics and e-health, addressing the challenges of frailty and disability and enhancing adherence to medication and nutrition.





## Kavita U. Kothari

Technical assistant, Clinical and Translational Research Center, Kobe University, Japan

Kavita was a volunteer/intern from September 2014 to June 2016 when she worked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Report on Urbanization and Health and developed an interest in geriatrics research.

*"From the internship in Kobe, I became a health information specialist, and now work on COVID-19 as a global health literature searcher, supporting the WHO emergency response team by developing search algorithms to retrieve the latest research on masks and aerosols, and capture the most recent citations on COVID-19 to feed into the WHO COVID-19 database daily.*

*As technical assistant in the Clinical and Translational Research Center at Kobe University, I manage and write up geriatrics research and help make Japanese research more accessible globally by preparing manuscripts for English-language journals."*

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, WHO and the University of Hyogo organized a public forum on 20 February 2015 on creating a resilient society and community for ageing populations in disaster situations.

A second **WHO Global Forum on Innovation for Ageing Populations** was organized in Kobe in October 2015, entitled 'Imagine Tomorrow' to explore ideas for transforming communities, systems and technologies for ageing populations worldwide. This forum came on the heels of the publication of the first WHO World report on Ageing and Health and WKC's publication of **Measuring the Age-friendliness of Cities: A Guide to Core Indicators**.

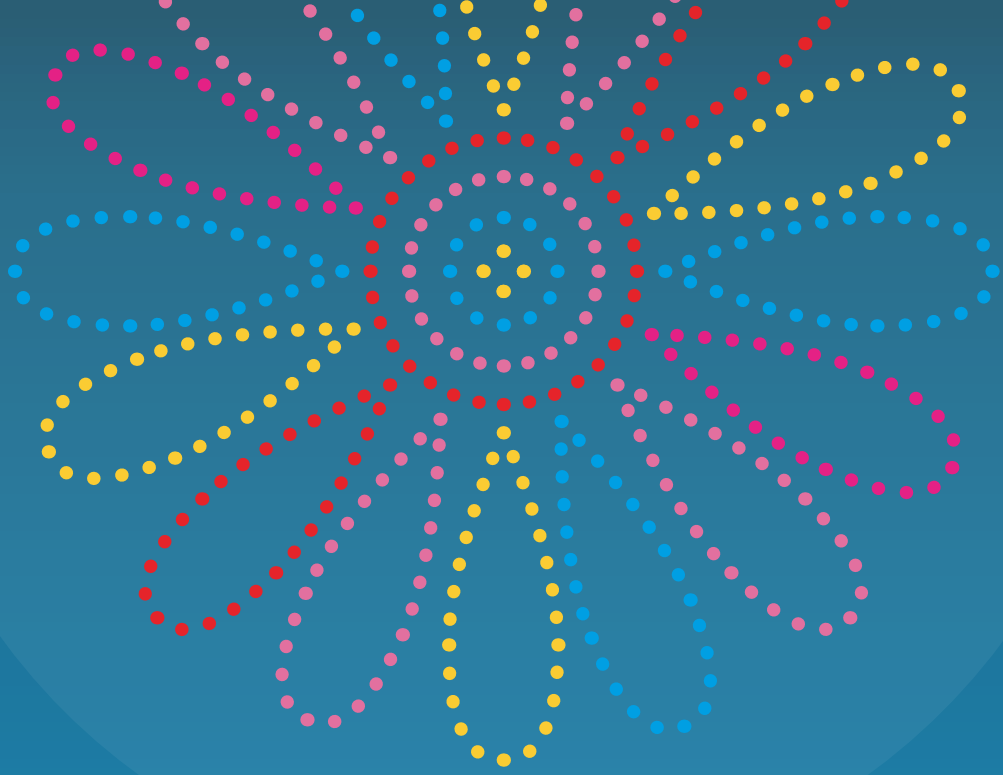
### February 2015

Public forum on creating a resilient society and community for ageing populations in disaster situations

### October 2015

Second WHO Global Forum on Innovation for Ageing Populations





# Into the Third Decade: 2016 – 2026



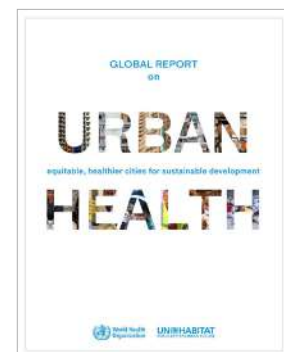
In January 2016, the third Memorandum of Understanding was signed to extend the work of WKC for another ten years. For the first time, the central government through the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare contributed funds to WKC to support this extension. WKC published the **second WHO/UN-HABITAT joint report, *Global Report on Urban Health: Equitable, Healthier Cities for Sustainable Development*** to mark the closure of its urban health agenda. In its place, the Centre developed a new strategy (2016-2026) which focused on **innovations for sustainable universal health coverage** to research and foster innovative solutions and translate them into policies and actions for sustainable universal health coverage, particularly for aging populations.

In May 2017, **Dr Sarah Louise Barber was appointed as Director of WKC**. WKC's vision was to become a global research centre, knowledge hub and a centre of research excellence for countries striving to attain UHC. A **new research plan (2018-2026)** was developed in consultation with key stakeholders, guided by WHO's General Programme of Work and the goals of the WKC strategy (2016-2026). The plan was launched in July 2019 to guide the third decade of work.

As a follow-up to the ASEAN-Japan Health Ministers Meeting in July 2017, WKC organized a joint workshop with the Kanagawa Prefecture Government on **UHC and the Impact of Population Ageing in ASEAN Countries**, with the support of Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The workshop focused on developing research proposals from nine international research teams involving ASEAN countries on UHC research for planning and strengthening of national health systems. This led to the development and funding of eight research projects by WKC.

### January 2016

Publication of the 2nd Global Report on Urbanization and Health



### May 2017

Dr Sarah Louise Barber appointed as Director of WKC

### July 2017

Workshop on UHC and the Impact of Population Ageing in ASEAN Countries

# Local Engagement Partners

Recent work with **Kobe University's Graduate School of Health Sciences** has focused on universal health coverage and aging. Principal investigator, **Professor Rei Ono**, explains:

*"Our team collaborated with WKC to develop a conceptual framework for a life course approach toward service coverage monitoring and analysed current scientific literature on the application of a life course approach to health policies, services, and interventions to identify possible areas for future research on service coverage monitoring.*

*The collaboration with WKC showed us that a life course approach may be useful to reforming health systems in low- and middle-income countries with ageing populations to achieve universal health coverage.*

*As a local university, the presence of WKC is very encouraging. I wish them continued success in the next decade."*



Project team at Kobe University

© Rei Ono, Kobe University

**Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management (Health EDRM)** is one of WKC's major research themes with local, national and international collaboration. Earlier, in 2016, WKC had helped establish the **WHO Thematic Platform for Health Emergencies and Disaster Risk Management Research Network** (Health EDRM RN) and was appointed the secretariat of the Network.

In this role, WKC organized an international meeting to accelerate research in Health EDRM in Kobe on 17 October 2018 with experts from WHO, the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and delegates to the Asia Pacific Conference on Disaster Medicine. In connection with this meeting, WKC also hosted a **Forum on Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management** for local and international stakeholders to discuss how Japan, Hyogo Prefecture and Kobe could contribute to developing global scientific evidence in this field.

## October 2018

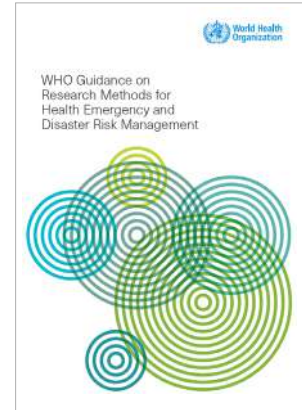
International expert meeting on Health EDRM research



The expert meeting led to the establishment of a global research network on Health EDRM comprising over 200 specialists from 40 countries and Kansai. Working with this network, **WKC coordinated and co-edited the world's first textbook on research methods for disaster risk management** to inform policy and practice to support the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Published in 2020, the *"WHO Guidance on Research Methods for Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management"* has input from over 160 global experts from 30 countries and includes case studies on real-life examples of research methods and how they have impacted policies.

## 2020

WHO Guidance on Research Methods for Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management published



## Local Engagement Partners



© Sonoe Mashino, University of Hyogo

Project team at University of Hyogo

WKC has collaborated with the **University of Hyogo's Research Institute of Nursing Care for People and Community** in disaster and health emergency research since 2016. **Professor Sonoe Mashino**, Executive Director of the Institute, describes the recent research project on Development of Specific Care Strategies to Maintain and Recover among Survivors' Health after Disasters.

*"The project, undertaken from February 2018 to November 2019, aimed to identify the fundamental needs, challenges and disaster risk of vulnerable populations such as older people and health care workers responding to a disaster. We conducted a letter-based survey of older residents who experienced the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, and did an interventional study for strengthening scientific evidence on effective interventions to prevent PTSD and depression among health care workers who responded to the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake."*

*This project provided the evidence for developing support for older people and health care workers in the event of a disaster. In addition, it strengthened the research collaboration between our institute and WKC and was an opportunity for us to expand the Health EDRM researcher network.*

*I always appreciate the support and the leadership of WKC in promoting research and other academic activities. I hope our relationship will continue and that we can make more contributions to make our community safe and healthy."*

## Megumi Ikemoto

Midwife/Senior Assistant Director,  
Bureau for International Cooperation,  
National Center for Global Health  
and Medicine (NCGM), Japan



Megumi joined WKC as a PhD student from the Graduate School of Nursing Art and Science at the University of Hyogo in Japan. She worked as an intern/research assistant from November 2017 to March 2018 in the area of Disaster Nursing in health emergencies.

*"I learnt about trends and priority problems in global health which led to my selection to attend the 71st World Health Assembly (WHA) as part of the student delegation of the International Council of Nurses in 2018. These experiences at WKC and the WHA were the turning point of my life in global health and led to my position at the Bureau of International Health Cooperation at NCGM in January 2020. I develop human resources through training opportunities for people in developing countries and Japan."*

*"In 2020, I participated in the "Nursing Now" campaign and the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife and completed my PhD in September 2020 during WKC's 25th anniversary year!"*

WKC's largest and most comprehensive research project, **Managing Dementia Patients in Kobe City**, is being carried out in partnership with Kobe University, Kobe Municipality and the Kobe Biomedical Innovation Cluster. This multi-year project aims to study and inform policy for health systems on the management of dementia patients and others with cognitive decline.

## Local Engagement Partners

WKC is supporting collaborative research with Kobe University on the Kobe Project for the Exploration of Newer Strategies to Reduce the Social Burden of Dementia. This study aims to benefit the local community through the development of a community-based model for the early detection and management of dementia. **Professor Yoji Nagai** of the **Clinical & Translational Research Center of Kobe University Hospital**, explains more about the study:

*"The research project has been designed to construct an efficient social model to enable earlier identification of individuals at long-term care risk due to dementia."*



Professor Yoji Nagai,  
Clinical & Translational  
Research Center of Kobe  
University Hospital

*In particular, the project aims to establish a quantitative feedback system in the local governmental health promotion services, by evaluating their effect in relation to the risk of dementia and long-term care."*

The project comprises four individual studies focusing on cognition-related parameters and long-term care need on apparently healthy community dwelling citizens, by receiving robust operational support from the Kobe municipal office. The data are collected in combination with the municipal public services, using a self-reporting neuropsychological/functional questionnaire. The outcomes are evaluated by the long-term care need certification data provided by the municipal office.

*"The project has established a practical collaboration between our institutions and the local government. It has also created a tangible model to utilize municipal civil service data for the purpose of academic research. We expect to realise an efficient social model through this project in which screening and/or risk assessment for dementia is regularly done as part of the local governmental services, and the risk is continuously evaluated in relation to the long-term care need. Thus, we are aiming to lay a foundation for realising quantitative feedback mechanism in the local administrative system, to reduce the social burden of dementia,"* says Professor Nagai.



## Joshua Gallagher

PhD Student in public health, Cambridge University, and Research Assistant at University College London, United Kingdom

Joshua joined WKC from the University of Tsukuba, Japan and conducted research on palliative and end of life care during his internship from May to July 2018.

*"Being an intern at WKC undoubtedly set me on course to pursuing a career in public health. At WKC, I saw how technical officers convened research teams around shared international challenges to health provision. I was able to connect with leading institutions in Japan involved in palliative care during my term. After leaving WKC, I was able to support several shared research projects on global ageing and palliative care policy in Japan and the UK.*

*In my career I hope to build on my capacity for fostering international collaboration for research by influencing policy to improve palliative care for older persons. I seek to bring people together to study, and importantly, act on the shared challenges and opportunities that global ageing brings."*

From left to right:  
 Dr Sarah Barber,  
 WKC Director;  
 Mr Takeo Saito,  
 Kanagawa Prefecture;  
 Prof. Naoki Ikegami,  
 Keio School of Medicine;  
 Dr Luca Lorenzoni (OECD)



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## June 2019

Joint study with OECD on price setting and price regulation in health care



Together with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in June 2019 WKC released a novel study on **price setting and price regulation in health care** to support countries to accelerate progress towards UHC. Researchers completed case studies from nine settings including Japan to generate lessons learned in price setting and regulation, particularly for low and middle-income countries, and to identify areas for future research.

## October 2019

Joint study with the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies on how ageing impacts revenues and expenditures for health



In October 2019, **WKC and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies** published two new studies to better understand how ageing impacts public revenues and expenditures for health. The research was launched at a side event of the G20 Health Ministers' Summit in Okayama, Japan.

In 2020, the world faced the unprecedented global pandemic of **coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**, which prevented any physical meetings. The Government of Japan, Hyogo Prefecture and Kobe City requested WKC to actively support and liaise closely with relevant departments in the central and local governments on COVID-19 to protect citizens. WKC focused its contributions to the local community on communicating and disseminating the technical information and public guidance. Around 90 WHO COVID-19 technical guidance notes were translated into Japanese and disseminated widely in Japan in 2020.

## 2020

Information dissemination in Japanese on the global pandemic of COVID-19

The basis for this translation work is the translation of WHO's Disease Outbreak News (DON) which WKC has been conducting since 2019 in cooperation with the Hyogo-Kobe Expert Committee on Health Emergencies. This activity also involves collaboration with the Narita and Kansai International Airport Quarantine Stations, and the translated information is posted on the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's quarantine website.

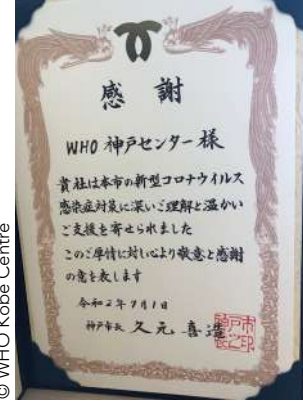
WKC also translated situation updates daily and created a dedicated webpage on its Japanese website to host all COVID-19 related information while posting regularly in Japanese on COVID-related issues on social media. Since the start of the pandemic, major Twitter posts reached three million views, Twitter followers grew from 1000 to 6000 within a few months, and there were over one million visits to WKC's website.

In April, as part of the Kobe community, WKC supported Kobe City's "blue light" tribute to frontline health workers and donated over 1000 masks to the city. WKC's Director, Dr Sarah Barber, wrote a letter of support to the city, emphasizing four Be's: Be Safe, Be Smart, Be Kind, Be Kobe.

WKC staff coordinate risk communication activities with headquarters and regional offices and collaborate with other UN agencies in Japan under the UN Security Management Team, as well as give weekly updates to the Kobe Group. In addition, WKC participates in local expert committees and provides briefings to the prefectural and city assemblies and relevant local organizations upon request.

## April 2020

WKC supported Kobe City's "blue light" tribute and received a letter of appreciation from the Mayor of Kobe



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# Local Engagement Partners



Dr Shinichi Nakayama,  
Director of the Hyogo  
Emergency Medical Centre

**Dr Shinichi Nakayama, Director of the Hyogo Emergency Medical Centre (HEMC)**, a COVID-19 frontline hospital, has collaborated with WKC on research and the promotion of medical management and health care in disasters since 2003.

*"As a key disaster base hospital in Hyogo prefecture, HEMC has been collaborating with WKC to promote health care in disasters for medical professionals and citizens in Hyogo and Japan. HEMC recently hosted two conferences and in each, WKC contributed well-attended and productive forums.*

*In 2020, HEMC has continued to fulfill its daily role as an emergency and critical care medical centre and has been providing intensive care to serious patients including COVID-19 infection. WKC's new webpage with WHO official information on COVID-19 in Japanese has been a source of timely and accurate information and of great assistance to HEMC amid the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*WKC has impacted our research field of disaster medical and health management, not only in Hyogo but also across Japan and overseas. HEMC is truly grateful to WKC for your great assistance."*

## Governance

WKC works closely with the WHO Secretariat at Headquarters, regional and country offices to ensure that its research plans support country needs. Its current research priorities are aligned with WHO's 13th General Programme of Work (2019-2023) which drives its strategic priorities to achieve WHO's triple billion targets with a greater focus on country-level impact. The Scientific Working Group reviews technical proposals to ensure research quality.

WKC receives strategic guidance from its Advisory Committee, composed of members from each of WHO's six regions who are appointed by the WHO Director-General. This external evaluation committee monitors and reviews WKC's research activities and evaluates results for scientific and technical soundness. The committee makes recommendations to the WHO Director-General on WKC's work and on intersectoral health research options according to WHO priorities. Additionally, three experts represent the Kobe Group, the local scientific community and the Government of Japan, respectively.

Local governance structures with the Kobe Group include annual Programme Review Committee meetings and quarterly meetings of the Joint Cooperating Committee meetings to ensure regular exchange of research progress, information and communication.

## Local Engagement

WKC has both a global and a local mandate. The Centre's local engagement focuses on sharing lessons learned across countries and encourage global collaboration as countries strive to attain their commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WKC also communicates and disseminates information about its research activities in the local community, and contributes to the community in Kobe and Hyogo prefecture for health awareness-raising and health advocacy.

Since 2016, WKC has strengthened its communications with the local community by hosting key meetings and forums to engage local partners and build youth capacity in the local area.

In September 2016, Kobe City hosted the G7 Health Ministers meeting for the first time. As part of this event, WKC, the G7 Kobe Health Ministers' Meeting Promotion Council and Japan's Ministry

### September 2016

First Hyogo-Kobe  
Global Health High  
School Summit

of Health, Labour and Welfare organized the **first Hyogo-Kobe Global Health High School Summit** for high school students on their contributions to global health. As part of its new commitment to nurture global awareness among youth, this meeting was the first annual event which WKC has since been organizing in partnership with the Hyogo Board of Education and Osaka University in support of the Super Global High School Initiative of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Between 2016 and 2020, these large-scale events have reached about 2500 high school students, inspiring them to become tomorrow's global leaders.

At least three WKC Forums have been hosted annually, including those which target high school students to stimulate thinking and develop the next generation. WKC makes its work accessible on its website with English and Japanese content, on social media activities on Twitter and YouTube, and through the media.

WKC also hosts student visits to the Centre and gives lectures on public health topics and WHO's work. Since 2016, the Director and technical staff have presented over 240 lectures to high school students in Hyogo Prefecture and further afield. COVID-19 did not stop WKC from engaging with local communities through online lectures, in line with WHO's guidance to staff for controlling the spread of the disease. The Centre has provided several online lectures to students since the pandemic began.

## June 2020

First online lecture to students since the pandemic began



Students present the Hyogo-Kobe GLOBAL Health High School Summit Declaration to WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan

# Local Engagement Partners

The emphasis on building capacity for the future is a new approach which Kansai partners have welcomed. One example to inspire the next generation of public health professionals is WKC's engagement with the **Kyoto University Global Health Interdisciplinary Unit (GHIU) at Kyoto University School of Public Health (KUSPH). Professor Masahiro Kihara** explains more:

*"WKC has supported the curriculum of our Global Health Course by providing lectures on social determinants of health delivered by Dr Megumi Rosenberg since 2016. From 2016 to 2018, WKC Directors supported the KUSPH by delivering keynote speeches at the Kyoto Global Conference for Rising Public Health Researchers. In addition, collaborative activities involved students' tour WKC to raise their awareness about the activities of WKC and WHO.*

*Together with GHIU, WKC also supported the High School Student Forum on Global Health held at Takatsuki High School through keynote speeches by Dr Ryoma Kayano (2017) and WKC Director, Dr Sarah Louise Barber (2018).*

*The collaborative activities with the WKC were very instrumental in sensitizing and nurturing students and junior researchers in public health for their future role in global health."*



Faculty and students of Kyoto University Global Health Interdisciplinary Unit (GHIU)



# WKC's Internship Programme - Supporting the next generation of public health professionals

WHO is committed to building a diverse pool of future leaders in public health to advance global health goals. Through WHO's Internship Programme at its office in Kobe, WKC has offered graduate and postgraduate students from around the world opportunities to gain insight into the technical and administrative programmes of WHO and participate in the work of the Organization. WKC interns have gone on to contribute to the advancement of public health in Japan and around the world.



## Lillian Madrigal

4th year doctoral candidate, Emory University School of Public Health, United States of America

Lillian joined WKC from Emory University School of Public Health and worked in the Director's Office supporting Grants Management from May to June 2018.

*"Growing up in Kobe, I always admired the work of the Centre and the collaboration with Kobe City and Hyogo governments. As a WKC intern, I was excited to learn more about how the WHO works in community interventions to prevent and manage noncommunicable diseases, and their mission to support countries in their progressive realisation of universal health coverage."*

*"Being an intern was an invaluable experience that provided me with a unique perspective on how international public health organisations operate and partner with national and local governments. I learned how public health researchers translate scientific evidence into health programmes, policies, and guidance to improve the health of populations. My experience at WKC provided me with a broader understanding of global public health and how to learn from other countries to address complex public health problems."*

# Our achievements in 2016 – 2020

## 48

**joint research projects**  
with renowned domestic  
and overseas research  
institutes



## 2500

**high school students** mainly  
from Hyogo Prefecture  
participated in the annual  
WKC High School Forums  
co-organized by the Hyogo  
Prefectural Education Board  
and Osaka University



## 84

**research  
publications**



## 256

**lectures** with a focus on  
youth in Kansai region



# 90+

**technical guidance documents on COVID-19** translated and disseminated in Japan



# 200+

**experts from 40 countries** collaborating on WHO's Global Research Network on Health Emergencies and Disaster Risk Management of which WKC is the Secretariat



# 6000+

**followers on Twitter,** up from 1000 in 2019



# 164

**experts from 30 countries** collaborated with WKC to compile the world's first textbook on research methods on health emergencies and disaster risk management



# 1 million+

**visits to WKC's website** in 2020 since the outbreak of COVID-19



## Into the future

WKC's past work, networks and collaborations, achievements and strengths provide a strong foundation to increase the evidence base for innovations and practical solutions to improve health. The Centre's vision is to become a global research centre, knowledge hub and a centre of research excellence for countries striving to attain UHC. Its goal is to have a transformational impact for health and social delivery systems, particularly for population ageing in the context of UHC. With COVID-19, the global use of internet discussion platforms has amplified WKC's ability to disseminate research and engage with local and global stakeholders.

The work of WKC in Hyogo-Kobe would not have been possible without the sustained support over 25 years of the Kobe Group and the Hyogo and Kobe communities, for which WHO and the Centre are sincerely grateful. WKC looks forward to furthering its work with partners across the Kansai region of Japan to fulfil both the global health mandate and the needs of the local community.

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