

THE FACE OF THE FUTURE

When Columbia Mailman School alumni met current students at a networking event on campus this spring, the room was buzzing with connection and community. There was lots of talk about career plans, challenges, and opportunities. One thing everyone could agree on: Public health matters.

Interviews by Dana Points
Photographs by John Herr



Suzanne Kirkendall, MPH '18

Sociomedical Sciences

CEO, North America at BVA Nudge Consulting

We apply human psychology to help clients change the behavior of customers, employees, and the public.

How has the degree furthered your career?

My public health degree honed my expertise in behavior change and communication and provided me with a strong global network of wonderful people with whom I continue to exchange expertise and opportunities.

What keeps you connected to the School?

Columbia Mailman School is one of my "happy places." I absolutely loved what I



was learning, I loved exploring New York, and I loved the people. I met some of my best friends through the program. I have a unique career that I love as a result of the program. Joining the Alumni Board in 2020 has been a wonderful way to stay in touch.

What's in the future for you?

I am fascinated by the science of how to help people, teams, and organizations grow and thrive. I'm excited about continuing to find new ways to combine my psychology, coaching, and business skills to solve interesting challenges.

Do you have a tip for today's students?

Don't be shy. You know more than you give yourself credit for, and you'll often be the expert in the room. Step up and share what you know so everyone can benefit. Get assertive—we public health folks can be nice to a fault. It's time to pull out all the stops.

Cassidy M. Stoddart, MPH '26

Health Policy and Management

Why public health?

I chose the degree after observing the lack of quality health-promoting tools in the Black community in urban areas.

What have you enjoyed about the School?

The program's networking culture has pushed me out of my comfort zone and prepared me to interact with individuals across different industries who will advance my career.

The field of public health is more than 100 years old. Why does it matter now?

Our global population is growing at such a rapid pace and getting more diverse. We must be open to adopting new intervention approaches and concepts.

What's in the future for you?

I intend to work in health policy analytics at the state and federal levels. My degree has been essential to teaching me about past public health failures and how to prevent unethical practices in program planning.

How are you feeling about the future of public



Hani Mahmoud, MPH '20

Population and Family Health

Technical Advisor at Resolve to Save Lives
I co-create solutions with country governments to prevent and prepare for epidemics globally.

How has the degree furthered your career?
My MPH helps me approach public health challenges with systems thinking, strengthening my ability to design, implement, and evaluate programs.

Do you have a tip or for today's public health students?
I think it is crucial to be able to tell a clear, compelling story about what you're looking

for when job-hunting and how it is rooted in your previous experiences.

What's in the future for you?

I went straight from my MPH to working at the global policy and planning level. I think there is a lot I can still learn by working on direct implementation with communities.

Why does public health matter now?

Public health matters now more than ever because the nature and interconnectedness of today's challenges—from climate change to colonialism—demand public health solutions and core principles. I'm hopeful that our generation will rebuild in a way that resists imperialism and centers human rights.

Joe LaRocca, MS '26

Biostatistics

Why public health?

I'm passionate about using mathematical and statistical methods to solve problems. I was pre-med but pursued biostatistics because I wanted a career with a more quantitative focus.

What have you enjoyed about the School?

I've enjoyed doing research. My work with the Belsky Lab at the Columbia Aging Center was a highlight of my first year.

How will your degree further your career?

I'm hoping to use my master's to enter a PhD program in biostatistics or to work full time at a hospital or university, or at a pharmaceutical or biotech company.

What's in the future for you?

I'm especially interested in genetics, preventive medicine, and healthy aging. We're only scratching the surface of what gene-editing treatments can do.

health? "Cautiously Hopeful" "Devastated" "Energized"

Jahsleighe Rochell, MHA '22

Health Policy and Management

Healthcare Consultant at Deloitte Consulting

I offer advice, analysis, and strategic planning to help healthcare entities innovate or solve problems.

How has your public health degree helped further your career?

My degree equipped me with the skills to strategically analyze complex challenges and develop solutions when working with diverse, large-scale stakeholders. It also provided a strong foundation in business and accounting.

What keeps you connected with the School?

Alumni and peers offered me invaluable insights and guidance, and I'm eager to pay that forward. Mailman's engaging events provide rich opportunities to learn and network.

Do you have a tip for today's students?

Seek opportunities to gain knowledge in other fields as well. Drawing connections between public health and areas like economics or architecture can offer valuable perspectives.



What's in the future for you?

I am passionate about helping organizations implement systems that enhance operational efficiency and modernize technologies. I'm particularly interested in how technology can be leveraged to improve quality metrics within the healthcare sector.

Why does public health matter now?

Significant health challenges continue to impact broad populations and require thoughtful, evidence-based solutions. The increased interest and awareness sparked by the pandemic present a unique opportunity. I believe my peers and I are well positioned to help rebuild trust and drive innovation.

Jade Chan, MPH '26

Population and Family Health

Why public health?

Health is a human right, and children need protection now more than ever. I also care deeply about reducing health disparities.

What have you enjoyed about the School?

Connecting with passionate, like-minded, and driven individuals, whether they are faculty or my peers. I have grown immensely on a professional and personal level here.

What's in the future for you?

I want to become a maternal and child health policy analyst. I strongly believe that my MPH will help me critically analyze health policies, advocate for evidence-based solutions, and collaborate with community organizations and health systems to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for mothers and children.

What problems are you excited to solve?

I think the biggest public health opportunities lie in health communication, digital health, and mental health (especially in maternal and child health). I am excited to help solve high maternal mortality rates and children's mental health challenges.

Why does public health matter now?

Public health matters more than ever as we face multiple, intersecting crises, from climate change and systemic racism to mental health challenges and maternal mortality.

"Speechless" "Steadfast" "Urgency" "Optimistic" "Resilient"

Sidraah Syed, MHA '26

Health Policy and Management

Why public health?

I hope to make a real, positive impact on healthcare systems and improve access to care.

What have you enjoyed about the School?

The professors! I've never had this many favorite professors. They are such accomplished, interesting people.

Where do you think the biggest public health opportunities lie in the coming decades? What problems are you excited to help solve?

Digital access—improving online scheduling tools to make access to healthcare easier in those ways! This is what my summer project is focusing on. I'm excited to solve problems around access, patient retention, and care coordination, especially for underserved populations.

Why does public health matter now?

Innovative and system-level thinking is more important now than ever in a world where we face pandemics, climate change, and health disparities.

What's in the future for you?

I hope to work in healthcare strategy either in an administrative role or as a consultant, using data and design to improve care delivery and access. The MHA is helping me build the skills and network to lead system-level change.

Kathleen A. Crowley, MPH '91, DrPH '13

Environmental Health Sciences

Vice President for Environmental Health and Safety at Columbia University

I lead and oversee a comprehensive health and safety program for research and clinical radiation, ensuring a culture of safety across campuses and affiliates.

How has your public health degree helped further your career?

My first public health degree, the MPH, was

pivotal in shifting my perspective from focusing solely on individual patient care to embracing a population-based approach.

What keeps you connected with the School?

Beyond working at Columbia University, I am connected by a deep sense of gratitude and purpose. I've served on the Alumni Board, including as president, and represented Mailman on the Columbia Alumni Association Board, which has a global community of more than 420,000. The



"Hopeful and Hesitant" "Concerned" "Committed" "Hopeful"



School has profoundly shaped my professional life, and staying connected allows me to help the next generation of public health professionals find their path.

Do you have a tip for today's students?
Keep an open mind and pursue the joy. Public health is a broad, dynamic field, and your path doesn't have to be linear. Follow your curiosity, stay connected to your values, and seek out opportunities that align with both your skills and your sense of purpose.

Why does public health matter now?
Facing serious health threats, from HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 to obesity and workplace violence, show that public health is both urgent and forward-looking. It equips us to protect communities today while preparing for emerging challenges.

What's in the future for you?
I see bright, passionate, capable students and professionals stepping up with energy and purpose. The future of public health will require all of us working together, staying grounded in evidence, and never losing sight of the greater good.

Vanya Bhardwaj, MHA '26

Health Policy and Management

Why public health?

While working for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, I learned to appreciate efficient systems. I've seen firsthand how operational and administrative burdens can be detrimental to patient care, and I want to reshape that from within.

What have you enjoyed about the School?
I've loved the people I've interacted with. From peers to professors to mentors, everyone radiates optimistic energy.

Why does public health matter now?
COVID taught us that no amount of technological or clinical advancement alone can shield us from uncertainty. A strong public health infrastructure is the framework through which we can respond to global health threats, promote wellness, and address disparities that can affect health.

What's in the future for you?
I'd love to work in consulting for a few years. Longer term, I want to develop a tool to alleviate administrative burdens in hospitals, to enhance patient experience and outcomes. I believe artificial intelligence will be key to making healthcare more affordable and enabling providers to focus on care without being overwhelmed by administrative burdens.

"Crucial" "Challenged" "Watchful" "Determined" "Limitless"



Nergui Ravzanaadii, MPH '23

Epidemiology

Chief Strategy Officer at Aecho.ai.

I lead research and product validation efforts for a health tech startup creating a behavioral health tool powered by voice data.

How has your degree furthered your career?

My MPH gave me analytical tools and systems thinking. It also deepened my understanding of structural inequities, which drives how I shape tech-enabled public health solutions.

What keeps you connected with the School?

I'm inspired by the passion and brilliance of alumni, faculty, and students. It reminds me why I chose this field—to create impact with others who care about health justice.

What's in the future for you?

I'm focused on refining how AI can responsibly support behavioral health and public health decision-making.

Do you have a tip for today's students?

Stay curious and open. The field is vast and evolving—your skills can apply in unexpected sectors. Don't be afraid to explore tech, policy, or entrepreneurship if the mission aligns.

Why does public health matter now?

I grew up as a nomadic child where healthcare was scarce. My family endured incredible hardship, and I lost two brothers—one to chickenpox due to a lack of access, and another due to an ill-prepared health provider. Public health is the key to making sure that every family, no matter how remote or vulnerable, has access to quality care, dignity, and hope.

Samiya Green, MPH '26

Epidemiology

Why public health?

I've seen gun violence claim the lives of innocent young people and illnesses worsen the struggles of those already facing economic hardship. My initial aspiration was to work as a physician, but I realized that I needed to engage more broadly with public health, which addresses these issues at their root.

What's in the future for you?

I aim to delve deeper into the underlying issues surrounding drug addiction, gun violence, and the pervasive lack of education related to health and disease. Why do these challenges exist? What are their root causes? Who is most affected?

What problems are you excited to help solve?

If we do not implement specific, strategic changes now, the future of public health could face significant challenges. Many of the existing systems need to be reconsidered and restructured to earn the trust of communities, especially those who have historically been skeptical of external interventions.

Why does public health matter now?

People who were historically silenced are speaking up, organizing, and demanding change. We are no longer just focused on preventing disease—we're addressing injustice, rebuilding trust, and fighting for equity. Public health today is about more than policies and data; it's about power.

"Uncertain" "Cautiously Optimistic" "Motivated"



Carlos Cuevas, MPH '12

Health Policy and Management

Consultant, Medicaid policy and strategy

What keeps you connected with the School?
Public health is constantly evolving. Mailman allows me to be a lifelong learner. Other schools teach the foundations of public health. But what makes Mailman special is its people! Being a top-ranked school of public health, located in New York City, with the resources of a world-renowned university, Mailman attracts talented professors and researchers. Staying involved allows me to meet new thought leaders, maintain relationships with career services for professional advice and hiring top-tier talent for my organization, and to meet the next generation of talented public health professionals.

What's in the future for you?

I will continue dedicating my skills to efforts that help underserved populations get access to vital health services while supporting the entities that provide that care.

Do you have a tip or for today's students?

The School gives you tools to succeed, but it's up to you to get practical experience. While you're in New York City, seek out opportunities at local health departments, nonprofits, and community organizations. Even a part-time role can lead to future positions and help you home in on what you like and don't like.

Why does public health matter now?

Public health will be one of the key economic issues for the foreseeable future. By focusing on prevention and early intervention, we will reduce costs and ensure healthy communities.

Navya Anne, MPH '25

Health Policy and Management

Why public health?

In high school, I was hospitalized and saw the inequities within the system. I knew I wanted to play a role in making care accessible for underrepresented populations.

What have you enjoyed about the School?
The passion of my fellow students has been inspiring to me.

What's in the future for you?

I am interested in the intersection of health and technology and how we can leverage technology to bring more accessible care at the population health level.

What problems are you excited to solve?

I think the biggest opportunities lie in the ability to advance who can receive quality and affordable care. Right now, the system is incredibly fragmented, and it is important to consider all kinds of populations and standardize the chance to receive care.

Why does public health matter now?

Public health is being seen as a right that can be taken away by the government. Access to healthcare is a fundamental right, and it should be treated as such.