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Hanze Hogeschool
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 University of Applied Sciences

Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health



Further development 2021–2026

Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health



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1. Background

The Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health (AJSPH) was founded in March 2018 by the faculties of the University of Groningen, the University Medical Center Groningen and Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen. The AJSPH's primary mission of 'more healthy years' gives substance to 'healthy ageing', the strategic theme of its three parent organizations. The goal is to foster links between researchers and lecturers within knowledge institutions on the one hand and between knowledge institutions and society on the other. In this way, the AJSPH is helping to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3¹, which – for the Dutch context – is specified in greater detail in the Health Mission of the Mission-driven Innovation Policy.² In de Noord-Nederlandse context sluit de AJSPH aan bij de Regionale Innovatiestrategie (RIS3) waar de overgang van ziekte en zorg naar gezondheid en gedrag centraal staat.

The AJSPH's operational strategy involves giving concrete shape to the parent organizations' strategies and working out the details. In effect, this means that in the period from 2021 to 2026, the AJSPH's role within the University of the North will be that of a School that gives substance to the theme of health, as envisaged in the preparatory documents for the University of Groningen's new Strategic Plan. In addition, the AJSPH will contribute to the development of the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres' (NFU) plan, entitled *Onderzoek en Innovatie met en voor de Gezonde Regio* (Research and Innovation with and for the Healthy Region). The AJSPH will also contribute to the Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen's strategic plan, which is based on the Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3). The operational strategy is also reflected in other fields. In the context of internationalization, for example, the AJSPH is helping to give substance to the health aspects of strategic alliances (e.g. with ENLIGHT, the University of Oldenburg, the University of Copenhagen and with universities in Latin America) and to give concrete shape to interfaculty and interinstitutional educational cooperation. Here, formal responsibility always rests with the original parties.

As a networking organization that interconnects its parent organizations, the AJSPH has an overarching role between the various health centres and health institutions within institutions and faculties (e.g. the Centre for Public Health in Economics & Business, the Centre of Expertise Healthy Ageing, the Centre for Health & Humanities, etc.). The AJSPH interconnects these centres and institutes within a framework of teaching and research, and facilitates joint valorization and innovation with partners from society, both public and private, and with members of the public.

In the run-up to the summer of 2020, the Committee of Deans and the Board of the University of Groningen pledged further funding for the AJSPH for the period from 2021 to 2026. Against that background, this plan outlines the AJSPH's development strategy for the upcoming period. It explores the areas of teaching, research, innovation and society, in addition to describing the strategy's financial foundation and outlining the process of further refining the strategy.

1 'Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.'

2 'By 2040, all Dutch people will enjoy at least five more years of life in good health. The health differences between the lowest and highest socioeconomic groups will have decreased by 30%.'

2. AJSPH in 2026

In aid of the University of Groningen's strategy, a memorandum has been drawn up that sets out the position that the various Schools should ideally have achieved by 2026. This is intended to be a goal that people can work towards. By 2026, the AJSPH will be seen as the North's leading public health knowledge party. The AJSPH works at the frontiers of knowledge, bringing together researchers from a range of scientific disciplines. The aim is to develop a sustainable pathway that can deliver more healthy years. We substantiate progressive health policy for public and private decision-makers in public health. We are also the 'go-to' brainstorming partner for national and international policymakers (both public and private). At an international level, the AJSPH is paving the way by establishing robust collaborative ventures with top institutes in Europe and elsewhere. Aside from interdisciplinary research, the AJSPH's rapidly growing reputation is also based on challenge-driven and linked public health teaching by the University Medical Center Groningen, the University of Groningen, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. This ties in with every stage in the careers of public health professionals and researchers. People in the Northern Netherlands are familiar with the AJSPH as a source of undemanding science communication that promotes health literacy and citizen science. Finally, a knowledge-intensive SME cluster in the area of public health has now emerged. Through mutual cooperation, this has unearthed new earnings models with regard to delivering more healthy years, especially in the field of data-driven innovation.

3. Strategic Further Development

In the strategic plan, we translate the mission and vision into concrete, feasible objectives. Here, we have identified five cornerstones that are closely related to the strategic goals and themes of the University of Groningen, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen and the University Medical Center Groningen. These cornerstones are: research, teaching, innovation, internationalization and public engagement. We don't work alone. When implementing these cornerstones, we cooperate with relevant stakeholders (both within the parent organizations and elsewhere) and leave plenty of scope for input from partners from society, both public and private. It is important that neither the strategy nor its development are set in stone. In addition, in the past, the AJSPH's ability to respond to relevant internal and external developments has been a key success factor. This will continue to be the case in the future.

As an overarching theme, the Public Health Agenda plays a key role. This formulates the translation of – and demarcations with respect to – the aforementioned international, national and regional agendas. This was drawn up jointly with the AJSPH's academic community (coordinators and fellows). It is summarized as follows:

“We focus on data driven prevention policy to connect local and global health challenges in order to add life to years, decrease health disparities, promote mental and social wellbeing, design sustainable health systems and enable healthy adaptation to environmental change.”

Next, there are five planned goals and three themes that transect these goals. The goals are:

- Add life to years;
- Promote mental health and social well-being;
- Decrease health disparities;
- Design sustainable health systems;
- Support healthy adaptation to environmental change.

The transecting themes are:

- Global Health;
- Healthy Lifestyle & Environment;
- Data-driven Prevention.

The five cornerstones³ are used to give further substance to the Public Health Agenda. The strategy's fundamentals in the various subfields are outlined here.

3.1 Research

The AJSPH encourages collaboration between researchers in terms of cross-disciplinary and translational research, and between researchers and regional, national and international partners from society, both public and private, and with members of the public.

Its research strategy is decidedly complementary to existing structures. In particular, it aims to facilitate any partnerships that are not thriving in single-discipline oriented forums. For instance, the upcoming period will feature a collaborative venture with the Federation of Graduate Schools (the umbrella organization for the eight Graduate Schools within the University of Groningen) on a Societal Graduate Programme in Public Health. This programme facilitates the supervision and teaching of PhD students who are taking a PhD alongside their regular work with social partners. There will be an examination of the options for including researchers who hold positions at different faculties and/or social institutions and knowledge institutions more visibly under the AJSPH umbrella. This will make it possible to better position cross-disciplinary research within the parent organizations. We are working with the parent organizations' Grant Support officers to strengthen the position of the AJSPH as a turnkey consortium for major applications. We are also helping to ensure that researchers are notified about relevant calls in good time. Together with mid-career researchers, we are exploring the options for developing proposals for the parent organizations that might better support individuals in this phase of their career (e.g. an advanced study programme). This research strategy will be further developed under the leadership of the Scientific Director.

3.2 Teaching

The goal of the AJSPH's teaching strategy is to promote, link and raise the profile of the public health related degree programmes provided by the University and the Northern universities of applied sciences among students, public health researchers and public health professionals.

This teaching strategy will be further developed in cooperation with educational stakeholders from the three parent organizations, as well as those from NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. These stakeholders hold regular meetings to coordinate matters concerning current

3 Research, teaching, innovation, internationalization, and public engagement.

degree programmes and course units (including the More Healthy Years Minor, the Master's in Healthy Ageing Professional, the Research Master's Health Systems & Prevention Track), new programmes (e.g. University College Fryslân's MSc in Sustainable Health, and the overarching vision regarding teaching as well as the follow-on options between the various programmes and the collective positioning of the Northern Netherlands as Europe's pre-eminent Public Health Education Region. It is important that these meetings do not replace existing forums on the teaching provided by faculties and institutions. In fact, its sole purpose is to prepare decisions in the regular forums and to strengthen them wherever possible. The meetings are supported by teaching staff. The AJSPH develops course units of its own in the areas of Minors and Summer Schools. This is exemplified by the More Healthy Years Minor and the Data Driven Prevention Policy in Public Health Summer School.

3.3 Innovation

The AJSPH's capacity for innovation is characterized by establishing, galvanizing and maintaining networks that help to foster the translational link between the knowledge institutions and society, in the area of public health. Aletta Consulting is the ideal vehicle for this purpose, providing access to the network of researchers within the parent organizations. That network can then tackle applied research and consultancy commissions from public and private parties in the Northern Netherlands. Embedded within the AJSPH's networking organization is the Prevention Accelerator, the brainchild of the University Medical Center Groningen and Menzis. It was very specifically designed to scale up interventions that have proven successful on a small scale.

There is also a large number of thematic and/or regional academic and innovation workshops. These are increasingly developing into broad-based learning networks with programme lines that systematically tackle health-related issues. Some examples of this are the Health Prevention Council Groningen, Aletta Fryslân and the FAITH consortium. Work is also in progress on the Public Mental Platform, led by the University Centre for Psychiatry (UCP) and the Population Health Data NL (PHDNL) platform. All of these networks are linked to specific health challenges, such as a healthy living environment, growing up safely and healthily, mental health and data-driven prevention. Each network is working to develop the innovative capacity of public health, using the iterative process of knowledge sharing, policy development and practical experience. By bringing these networks together in one place, the AJSPH can operate as an intersection point between the networks. It can also provide support for activities that cannot be organized as efficiently by individual networks operating independently. The innovation strategy is fleshed out in detail by the Innovation Officer.

3.4 Internationalization

Irrespective of time and place, public health is always a local phenomenon. It takes place in a global context and, in doing so, gives shape to that context. Accordingly, international exchanges between researchers, and between policymakers as well, are a vital element here. They enable these individuals to continuously benefit from lessons learned elsewhere, and to share the insights that we develop in the Northern Netherlands with the rest of the world.

The AJSPH, in line with the University of the North, is committed to regional internationalization in which knowledge institutions have a special part to play – as knowledge pipelines to other regions. In this endeavour, we have opted to link up with the parent organizations' existing strategic partners and networks. In the

context of the collaborative venture with these partners and networks, the AJSPH is helping to give concrete shape to the public health component. In specific terms, we are currently performing this role via the Cross-Border Institute of Healthcare Systems & Prevention. Together with this institute, we will give substance to the public health component of the collaborative venture with the University of Oldenburg. In the same way, we are also assisting with the NLIGHT network, and with the public health component of the partnership between the University of Copenhagen and the University Medical Center Groningen. In the context of start-up partnerships with the University of Hamburg and various universities in Latin America, we are acting as a forward staging post, helping to shape the first steps towards more structural cooperation.

The current geopolitical climate in Europe and beyond makes it even more important for the Northern Netherlands to have an open and international image as a knowledge landscape. Brexit, plus the decision by Danish universities to teach courses mainly in Danish, and the continuing social divisions in the United States will cause large numbers of students to seek alternative institutions and many potential members of staff to reconsider their career options. With an excellent Anglo-Saxon educational system, the Netherlands is well positioned to offer these students and staff a new base. The Northern Netherlands in particular can play an effective part in this, given its wide range of educational provision. Another factor is the integration between the knowledge institutions and the cities, making Groningen in particular very much like a typical US college town. This paves the way for a robust proposition in the international context of public health, as this is one of the few places where you can study – or research – health-related subjects from a large number of perspectives (fundamental, applied or practical). To capitalize on this opportunity, the AJSPH is helping to position the Northern Netherlands as the ideal place to conduct public health studies, regardless of which knowledge institution is involved.

3.5 Public Engagement

Our lifespans are increasing, but we are not spending those extra years in good health. This is boosting the demand for care. At the same time, the number of people who are capable of delivering professional care and informal care is declining. Throughout the Netherlands, and particularly in the North (where population shrinkage and ageing are having a relatively large impact), this is putting pressure on the health system. The good news is that half of all chronic diseases – such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer – can be prevented by adopting a healthier lifestyle. Sadly, some people are not able to make healthy choices. Smoking, obesity and a lack of exercise appear to be particularly common in villages and neighbourhoods with low-skilled residents with lower incomes. A major factor here is a lack of health skills, mainly in the case of low-skilled people with lower incomes.

Against this background, the AJSPH will be investing in public engagement in the upcoming years. In this way, we hope to help bring about a long-term improvement in the health skills of vulnerable Northerners, by means of undemanding knowledge transfer. The AJSPH's public engagement strategy has two main objectives:

1. Involve Northerners and Northern health organizations in ongoing knowledge development projects in the area of health.
2. Boosting social confidence in scientific knowledge.

We have recently been experimenting with a modest public engagement offering. We now want to scale this up – both in terms of range and quality – to create a national showpiece. This involves setting up original, attractive, undemanding and interactive projects, which mainly focus on citizen science, in places where public health is under pressure. We will do this in cooperation with regional consortia such as the Health Prevention Council Groningen and Aletta Fryslân, as well as with regular partners such as the Northern Netherlands Healthy Ageing Network (HANNN), Forum Groningen and Studium Generale. The first steps in this direction have now been taken, together with the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and the Groningen National Programme's (NPG) 'Chronically Healthy' call.

4. Governance

4.1 Management and accountability

A management team, consisting of an Scientific Director and a General Manager, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the AJSPH. This management team is accountable to the University of Groningen's Committee of Deans and the Executive Board of Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen. Each of these latter bodies are represented by a number of members. The day-to-day management of the AJSPH is carried out by the Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMW, also the Chair), the Dean of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (GMW), the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), and by a member of Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen's Executive Board who is responsible for the Healthy Ageing portfolio. This board of management meets four times a year with the management team, to discuss the School's strategic and organizational course and the financial results. On these matters, this board answers to the University of Groningen's Committee of Deans and the Executive Board of Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen. Once a year, the management team discusses the AJSPH's progress with the University of Groningen's full Committee of Deans. In addition, substantive aspects of the AJSPH's course are addressed in brainstorming sessions with two external councils. There is a biennial consultative meeting with the scientific council, with regard to the scientific content. Furthermore, the School's impact in the region is discussed with the partner council.

4.2 Organizational embedding

The AJSPH's overarching role is put into effect through the parent organizations' decentralized health centres and the directors who run them. The centres concerned are:

- Centre for Health and Humanities, Faculty of Arts
- Centre for Religion, Health and Wellbeing, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
- Centre of Expertise Healthy Ageing, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen
- Global Health Law Groningen Research Centre, Faculty of Law
- Social Sciences Centre for Health and Well-being, Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences
- Centre for Public Health in Economics and Business, Faculty of Economics and Business

The directors of these centres are also de facto AJSPH coordinators. Within their respective faculties and institutes, they are the primary points of contact in the area of public health, and regularly coordinate with the AJSPH on such matters. They also contribute to the AJSPH's strategic development. In addition, there are other participating faculties that do not have their own public health centres. These are the faculties

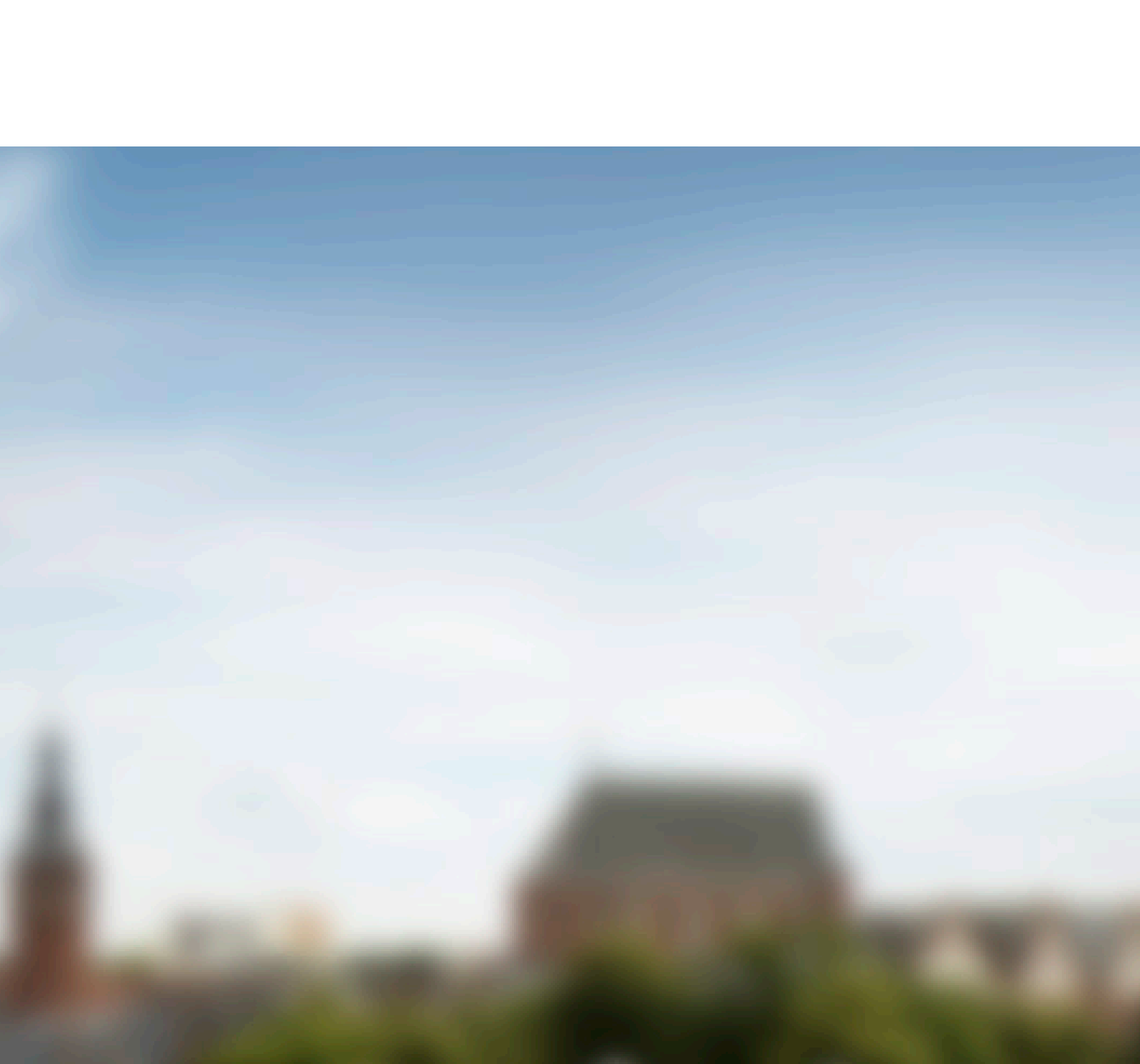
of Spatial Sciences, University College Groningen, Science & Engineering and Medical Sciences. They will continue to be involved, in the same way, by means of existing coordinator appointments. Like the other faculties, they are encouraged to create faculty-based public health centres.

4.3 Community building

Aside from the work of the coordinators, community building also takes place within the AJSPH, via Aletta Fellows and the Aletta Talent Network. This approach caters to every research level, from trainee specialist to full professor. Activities such as Research Meet Ups and symposiums are held, to help the AJSPH retain these researchers. In addition, these individuals are encouraged to get involved in regional partnerships. We are also keen for them to take part in various activities in the areas of teaching, internationalization and public engagement. We also encourage them to contribute their own ideas, through the planned Aletta Health Grant.

4.4 Influencing

One key aspect of the AJSPH is its scientific influence on current administrative and policy matters, both at a regional and national level. The AJSPH wants to expand this bridging position along two lines over the next five years. The first of these involves the regional coalitions referred to in subsection 3.3, such as Health Prevention Council Groningen and Aletta Fryslân (the plans for Drenthe are already being drawn up). On the one hand, these networks form an ideal testbed for initiatives in The Hague, such as city deals, regional deals and prevention agreements. At the same time, they are ideal platforms for the coordination of collective lobbying messages. In addition, the AJSPH is expanding its national reputation still further by assisting with regional lobbying processes and lobbying files from the parent organizations. The short lines of communication between the AJSPH and relevant ministers, journalists and governmental policymakers are very helpful in this regard.



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