

Introduction to R for Public Health Investigations

Meet our R superstars!

Facilitator, Producer, and Subject Matter Expert Biographies

ALANAH JANSEN, FACILITATOR

VICTORIA, BC | PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

Alanah is the newest Senior Epidemiologist with the Training and Development Unit based in Victoria, where she has recently moved. Prior to joining the TDU, Alanah worked for Doctors Without Borders in five countries over the past three years implementing general surveillance systems, responding to outbreaks and conducting surveys. She has also worked in several epidemiologist roles with the Government of the Northwest Territories since completing her master's in public health. Whenever possible, Alanah enjoys being outside and going on adventures with her furry companion.

ALEXANDRA NUNN, FACILITATOR

OTTAWA, ON | CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM

Alex Nunn is a field epidemiologist in cohort 48 of the Canadian field Epidemiology Program and a registered nurse. She is based in Ottawa, ON and placed remotely with Algoma Public Health (Sault Ste. Marie, ON). While working for PHAC during the COVID-19 response, Alex used R for data cleaning and analysis during two outbreak investigations. In her spare time, she cooks, rides her bike, and weaves at her loom.

**BENJAMIN HETMAN, COURSE CO-LEAD****WINNIPEG, MB | TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT**

Ben has been working for the Public Health Agency of Canada since 2010. He started out his career in the lab working for the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) in Lethbridge, AB and in 2016, moved to Guelph ON to pursue a PhD in Epidemiology. In 2019, Ben joined the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program where he was placed with the Outbreak Management Division, supported local and provincial health jurisdictions with over 100 days in the field, and is now an Epidemiologist with the Training and Development Unit. Ben has a range of experiences in public health – from basic and applied microbiology to surveillance and outbreak response; a consistent thread through it all, however, has been his love of working with data and using coding skills to solve practical challenges. When not reading R blogs or proving that R can be used to do virtually anything, Ben spends time with his puppy Mila, and participates in a variety of totally cool role-playing adventures.

**CASSANDRA LYBECK, SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT****OTTAWA, ON | CENTRE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND INFECTION CONTROL**

Cassandra Lybeck works at PHAC in the STI and hepatitis section as an Epidemiologist. She focuses primarily on the enhanced surveillance of antimicrobial resistant gonorrhea (ESAG) project, and supports the enhanced surveillance of syphilis and other STIs. Aside from STI's, she is passionate about keeping up up-to-date in the world of respiratory viruses - as her MSc in Biochemistry focused on a common respiratory virus (Adenovirus) and how it interacts with its host cell during latent infection. She co-manages the PHAC R User group with Najmus Saqib and loves working in R!

**CHRIS WITUIK, FACILITATOR****VANCOUVER, BC | CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM**

Chris is a second-year field epidemiologist with the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program. He is currently placed with the Public Health Surveillance Unit at Vancouver Coastal Health, where his work has focused on HIV and sexually transmitted infection surveillance, as well as supporting the environmental health and overdose emergency response portfolios. He is a Registered Nurse and holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (McMaster University) and a Master of Science in Epidemiology (LSHTM). Chris enjoys bike trips, hiking, and spending time with his cat, Phil.

**JENNEY WANG, FACILITATOR****OTTAWA, ON | CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM**

Jenney Wang (she/her/elle) is a second-year Field Epidemiologist in CFEP placed at Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)'s Migration Health Branch. Prior to joining CFEP, Jenney worked at various provincial government agencies focusing on cancer research, health equity, and knowledge translation, and has a Masters of Public Health from the University of Saskatchewan. She is also still on the R learning journey and is very excited to facilitate this year's training. Outside of work, Jenney likes to volunteer for community agencies, bake, and hang out with her orange cat, Cookie.



JOANNE STARES, COURSE CO-LEAD

ST. JOHN'S, NL | TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Joanne has worked in public health since 2008, starting first as an analyst at the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information. In 2010 they joined the Public Health Agency of Canada as a Public Health Officer with the Canadian Public Health Service. They started their career using SAS primarily until “seeing the light” in 2013, and Joanne’s analytical software of choice has been R ever since. In 2017, Joanne joined the Training and Development Unit. Here they enjoy creating and delivering technical training and supporting field staff in furthering the development of their talents and toolbox of skills. Over the years, they have participated in a number of mobilisations, worked in a variety of different content areas including communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, and environmental health, and gained much experience directly working with large administrative health datasets. Outside of work you can usually find Joanne enjoying the outdoors, reading a book, chilling with their cat, spending time with friends and family, practicing a new artistic skill, or having a laugh over something silly.



MARC-ANDRÉ BELAIR, FACILITATOR

VANCOUVER, BC | TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Marc-André Bélair is an Epidemiologist with the Training and Development Unit in the Office of Emergency Preparedness, based in Vancouver, BC. He holds a B.Soc.Sci in Political Science, and an M.Sc. in Epidemiology from the University of Ottawa. Marc-André has been working and studying in public health in one capacity or another for over 15 years, in both policy and epidemiological capacities. In addition, he has had the privilege of being deployed five times in the last three years. He has lead the development and evaluation of syndromic surveillance for mass gathering events as part of the G7 Summit in Quebec City in 2018; for asylum seekers in temporary housing in Montréal; and the Jeux du Québec in 2019. Additionally, he has completed two COVID-19 mobilizations, in the Fraser Health Authority in the lower mainland of BC, and Montreal Public Health. Marc-André sings in the Tenor 2 section of the Vancouver Men’s Chorus, loves to travel (in normal times!) and is passionate about video games, cooking, hiking, cheese making.

**MICHAEL-ALEXANDER NAJM, PRODUCER****OTTAWA, ON | TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT**

Michael is a Senior Project Officer with the Training and Development Unit at the Public Health Agency of Canada. He has been with the Agency since 2018 where he first supported the TDU from within the Center of Emergency Response's operational unit. Later, he had the chance to support the COVID-19 response under the Office of Border and Travel Health, mainly working on Travel Health Notices, and has since rejoined the TDU.

**MIRNA PANIĆ, FACILITATOR****MONTREAL, QC | TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT**

Mirna completed her Bachelor of Science in Ecological Determinants of Health and Master of Science in Public Health at McGill University. Following her graduation, she has worked at the *Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec* (INSPQ) on a range of files including vectorborne disease surveillance, legionellosis and climate change adaptation. Mirna is an alumnus of the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program, during which she was placed at the INSPQ. Since 2016, Mirna has been working within PHAC's Training and Development Unit, where she is currently in an acting position as team manager. In her free time, you will find her hiking or paddle boarding with her dog, attempting to make time to read a book or two, and cooking or wolfing down good food.

**NAJMUS SAQIB, SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT**

OTTAWA, ON | CENTRE FOR DATA MANAGEMENT,
INNOVATION AND ANALYTICS

Naj is a Data Scientist at the PHAC Office of the Chief Data Officer. Most of his recent R work has been dedicated to utilizing the language on the cloud for robust data engineering and data science solutions. Naj also co-leads the PHAC R Users Group, through which monthly lunch-and-learn sessions are held to exchange best practices and share some great work done in R by group members across the Agency and beyond.

**NISRINE EL AMIRI, FACILITATOR**

OTTAWA, ON | CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM

Nisrine El Amiri is a second year field epidemiologist working with the COVID-19 Surveillance and Planning team at the Centre for Immunization and Respiratory Infectious Diseases at PHAC. Nisrine has a Master of Public Health degree from the University of British Columbia and a Bachelor of Science degree from McGill University. She has experience working in the fields of rural/global health, mental health, substance use and infectious diseases. While she is quadrilingual, her favorite language is R.