

# Leaders in Health Alumni: Five Questions with Adriana Tejada

*December 2023*

## 1. What drew you to participate in the Leaders in Health program?

“I was at the very beginning of my career in Public Health when a colleague of mine reposted a LinkedIn post made by Dr. Lee regarding the Leaders in Health program. I was looking for ways to expand my knowledge in public health and apply what I was doing in my current role (at that time I was a communications coordinator) to some critical public health frameworks. LIH fit the bill entirely! Not only was it being run by fantastic staff within the prestigious Harvard University, but it also had a wonderful curriculum and a great sense of community. The alumni network of previous LIH scholars sealed the deal for me as I understood that many of them were in successful roles in public health that I deeply admired.”

## 2. What was your Leaders in Health project about?

“My Leaders in Health project was about increasing school breakfast participation in middle school settings. It was titled ‘Feeding the Future’ and I had applied my experiences working with NH Hunger Solutions, a nonprofit with the mission to end hunger in New Hampshire. I focused on a lot of evidence-based practice when it came to choosing an intervention for the project. Breakfast beyond the bell is an evidence-based practice known to increase school breakfast participation, which has many cognitive benefits for school age children in learning. The completion of my LIH project helped me strategize for projects I was dealing with at work regarding free and reduced meal applications and increasing SNAP enrollment in low-income communities in the Granite state.”

## 3. What was your favorite part of participating in Leaders in Health?

“My favorite part was re-learning about the Community Based Participatory Research approach. Although I had learned it in undergrad, being able to apply it was a whole different ball game. I understood it in a way that allowed me to recognize the importance of community engagement. Additionally, I really enjoyed interacting with my peers in the LIH program. They all brought such different breadths of knowledge that allowed me to feel like I was a part of something larger than just LIH. The last session involved us piecing together what we had learned on the Harvard Public Health framework and do a virtual presentation on our projects to the cohort. It was so fun to finally be able to visualize everything my peers were working on and I was truly blown away!”

## 4. What are you up to now? Any plans for the future?

“Currently, I am a Health Communications Manager at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, specifically the Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality. I work with many media outlets daily to ensure that the correct information about long-term care facilities is shared with the public. I also help maintain the Mass.gov web pages that belong to our bureau and update them on a weekly basis. Additionally, I do various administrative tasks, including making PowerPoint for our monthly bureau all-staff meeting, editing data briefs from our quality improvement team, and writing talking points for the Commissioner’s

office. In my one year in this position, I have learned so much, but I yearn for that sense of community once again. That feeling got me into public health in the first place. I am also halfway through my online Master of Public Health program at the University of Michigan. I chose the concentration on health behavior and health education because I wanted to learn about how the promotion of health can provoke behavior change. I am passionate about nutrition, health communications, minority health, and maternal and child health. Upon graduating in 2024, I hope to start branching out and looking for more growth opportunities, whether a new role, fellowship, or joining a new service-oriented group.

In the coming years, I see myself with a more public-facing job that allows me to interact with members of the community I am trying to serve. That could be within DPH or outside of DPH, but I am always on the lookout for opportunities to enhance my skill set that aligns with my career goals. In October, I was one of the David A. Winston Health Policy Scholarship recipients. I got the chance to fly out to Washington, D.C., and chat with some key players in health policy on the Hill. I left that experience excited for the future of health policy and health communications. I can see myself in D.C. one day, but I love my life in Massachusetts, so it would be a difficult decision!”

## **5. What advice would you share to those who might be interested in applying for a future Leaders in Health cohort?**

“I would say my biggest advice would be to ‘just do it’! I’m taking the Nike brand’s slogan for my advice, because honestly it was exactly what I needed to hear when I was thinking of applying. Public health careers are built on learning, networking, and connection. That is what LIH is all about! Leaders in Health is something that almost all of my interviewers asked me about when I was looking for work, and I was always so stoked to talk about my wonderful experience. Lastly, I would say that it is important not to let your imposter syndrome keep you from applying or engaging in the program. Your experience is valuable and your voice needs to be heard!”