



## Distinguished lecture series: conversations on the future of public health

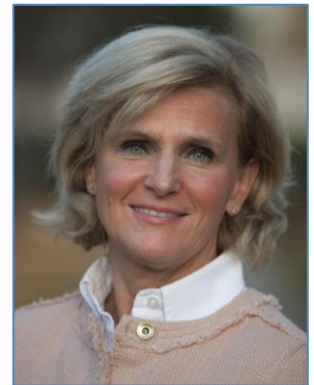
*28 years of COP – what does it mean for action on climate change and the role of public health?*  
Friday 15 March 2024, 10.00am – 11.30am (GMT)

### Speaker biographies

#### Dr Maria Neira

**Director of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health, WHO**

Dr Maria P. Neira is the Director of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Health at the World Health Organization. Prior to that she served as Under-Secretary of Health and President of the Spanish Food Safety Agency. Dr Neira began her career as a medical coordinator working for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). She then spent several years working in different African countries during armed conflicts. Dr Neira is a Medical Doctor by training, specialized in Endocrinology and Metabolic Diseases in Paris, France, Master of Public Health and a University Diploma in Human Nutrition, Epidemic Preparedness and Crisis Management. Among many distinctions, she has been awarded the Médaille de 'L'Ordre National du Mérite' by the Government of France and received an 'Extraordinary Woman' award by HM Queen Letizia of Spain. In early 2019, she was nominated among the top 100 policy influencers in health and climate change.



#### Professor Kevin Fenton

**President, Faculty of Public Health**

Kevin Fenton is the President of the Faculty of Public Health. He is a senior public health expert and infectious disease epidemiologist who has worked in a variety of public health executive leadership roles across government and academia in the United Kingdom and internationally. His specialist interests are in tackling health inequalities, infectious disease prevention and control, climate justice and urban health.

Professor Fenton is the Regional Director for London in the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) within the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Within this role, he is also the statutory public health advisor to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority and the Regional Director of Public Health for NHS London. He is also the government's Chief Advisor on HIV and Chair of the HIV Action Plan Implementation Steering Group for England.



#### Deborah Harkins

**Director of Public Health, Calderdale Council**

Deborah has worked as Director of Public Health at Calderdale Council since April 2020. As well as Public Health, she is the Director responsible for Climate Action. Deborah is passionate about community-centred approaches to protecting and improving people's health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. She is working to apply these values to her leadership of the climate change agenda.



## **Professor Mala Rao**

**Director, Ethnicity and Health Unit, Imperial College London, Chair, Expert Group on Climate Change and Health, WHO South East Asia Region and Vice Chair, WaterAid UK**

Mala Rao's career has spanned public health practice, policy and research in the UK and in the global arena. She has led groundbreaking achievements in workforce development for public health, strengthening health systems for universal health coverage and climate and health.

Mala is a recognised champion of climate action, safe water and sanitation and gender and race equity. Her publications include the 2009 'Health Practitioner's Guide to Climate Change', the health chapter in Government of India's 2010 report on climate impacts and the 2022 issue of the International Review of Psychiatry on the climate crisis and mental health. She has been included in the most influential ethnic minority people in the English health world and is the recipient of awards including an OBE in 2013, the Faculty of Public Health's Alwyn Smith prize in 2021 and a CBE in 2024.



## **Paul Johnstone**

**Chair, FPH Climate & Health Committee**

Paul is an independent public health consultant and former regional director of public health for the North of England and Yorkshire. In these roles he has worked for DHSC, NHS England, Public Health England (PHE), and as national director for regions for the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). He currently chairs the UK Faculty of Public Health Climate and Health Committee which supports public health professionals on climate change action to improve health. His other portfolio commitments include adviser on gambling harms, clean air policy and internationally, to VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas). Earlier in his career Paul worked as a hospital doctor, GP and director. He also worked extensively on public health in other countries, most recently for WHO on the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, and earlier in Montserrat (West Indies- for UK Govt), Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sudan. Paul has honorary chairs in global health and public health at Manchester University and Leeds Beckett University where he continues his academic interests. He lives in North Yorkshire with his family.



## **Dr Maria Van Hove**

**Public Health Specialty Registrar**

Maria van Hove is a doctor and public health registrar, currently based at UK Health Security Agency. Prior to this, Maria worked as an academic public health registrar in the South West of England, where her research focussed on sustainable food systems and the role of public health in the climate and ecological crisis. Maria has had a longstanding interest in climate change and the environment and has previously led work for the European Union on invasive species and worked on sustainability at NHS England and NICE. Maria is currently co-chair of the Faculty of Public Health's Sustainable Development Special Interest Group and a member of the FPH Climate and Health Committee.

