

# POLICY ACADEMY

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

**LESLIE FOWLER**

*Prevention Program Manager*

*Communicable Disease Unit*

*Wyoming Department of  
Health*



**National Coalition  
of STD Directors**

**ISSUE NO.01**

**JULY 2026**



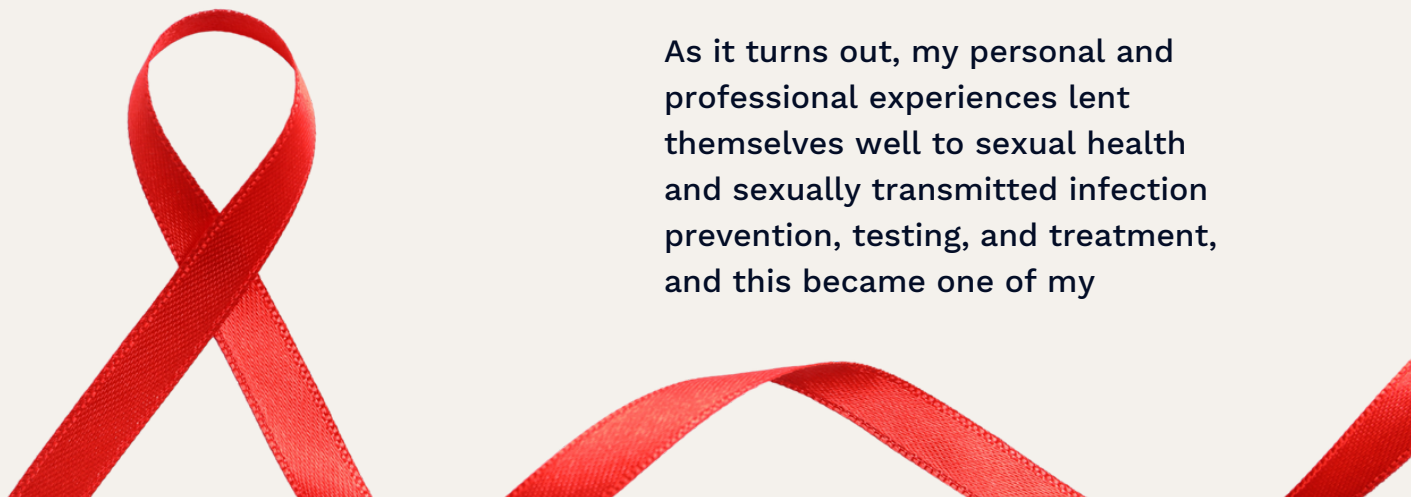
**FIRST, TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR ROLE IN THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO TO SOMEONE YOU JUST MET?**

I've been a nurse for 33 years, and I serve as the Prevention Program Manager for the Communicable Disease Unit in the Public Health Division. In that role, I serve as the principal investigator for the CDC STI, HIV, and TB prevention grants. I also manage hepatitis B & C prevention, our Unit's portion of the CDC Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, and I oversee 340B STI and TB activities for our Unit.

**LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC HEALTH ORIGINS STORY BECAUSE EVERYONE WHO WORKS IN THIS SECTOR HAS ONE! HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED IN STI PREVENTION? WHAT INSPIRED YOU?**

I have always been passionate about preventive health. After becoming a nurse, I found that traditional floor nursing was limiting, so I ultimately transitioned to home health nursing; this experience further spurred my advocacy for accessible preventive and acute care. Following changes in the home health industry, I returned to school to earn my bachelor's degree. I chose to complete my practicum at the local public health office, and after finishing my degree, I accepted a position in public health nursing. I spent a great deal of my life in areas of the country that were significantly impacted by the HIV epidemic and lost a close family member and several friends to HIV in the late 80s and early 90s. When I lived in Florida in the early 90s, I became an HIV/AIDS 104 instructor for the Red Cross.

As it turns out, my personal and professional experiences lent themselves well to sexual health and sexually transmitted infection prevention, testing, and treatment, and this became one of my



specialties as a public health nurse. I often assisted patients in notifying their partners, and the strategies I implemented helped reduce the infection rates in the county while also increasing testing rates. While all public health topics are valuable, I have come to realize that my passion lies in communicable diseases. After eight years in the PHN role, the Communicable Disease Unit had both the DIS/epi and Prevention Program Manager positions open. I applied for both and was able to choose which position I wanted.

**The rest is history.**

### **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT WORKING IN STI PREVENTION?**

I really enjoy interacting with people to find out what is working well for them and what they perceive as barriers to living their best lives. When you take the time to interact with and listen to people at all levels of the healthcare spectrum and utilize your knowledge and resources, as well as those of the people around you, it is far easier to impact meaningful change. That is where the magic happens.

**MANY PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS CAN FEEL OVERWHELMED WITH POLICY; IT SEEMS OUT OF REACH OR HARD TO ENGAGE. YOU GRADUATED FROM NCSD'S POLICY ACADEMY AND HAVE BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN NUMEROUS POLICY PROJECTS.**

### **WHICH PROJECTS WERE YOUR FAVORITE AND WHY? WHAT SHOULD OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS KNOW ABOUT ENGAGING IN STI POLICY WORK?**

I cannot say enough good things about my Policy Academy experience. While I had the skills I needed to work on policy projects, Policy Academy gave me the ability to organize those skills and support the population in meaningful, realistic ways. My Policy Academy cohort happened to coincide with a hepatitis C cluster in my area. At that time, the knowledge of and accessibility to hepatitis C





prevention, testing, and treatment were very limited. My initial goal was to offer a prevention strategy that is evidence-based and frequently used in other jurisdictions.

As I implemented the project, I learned that the prevention strategy I had chosen was not well received by the population. With the skills I gained from Policy Academy, I worked closely with community members, stakeholders, and people with lived experience. Stakeholder meetings revealed limited awareness of the continuum of substance use and recovery and provided an opportunity to increase awareness and develop prevention, testing, and linkage-to-care strategies specific to our community. The project I did for Policy Academy is still one of my favorite projects, and it also taught me that the intended outcome of such projects must align with the population's needs and priorities. That was a valuable lesson.

#### **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE IN A FRONTIER STATE OR RURAL HEALTH SETTING WHO WANTS TO GET INVOLVED IN PUBLIC HEALTH?**

Evidence-based practices are often based on research conducted in large populations; what is evidence-based in large populations may not be feasible or accessible in frontier and rural settings. The health of the population matters regardless of where they live. Large populations and many federal organizations are accustomed to having many options to meet their needs and are often unaware of the challenges of accessing care in frontier and rural settings. You are the expert on your population. When you are at conferences or in meetings, sharing the experiences of your community and your work with those outside of your area will help increase understanding and improve care for everyone.

# ***ABOUT THE POLICY ACADEMY***

Through the Policy Academy, NCSD trains individuals from state, local, and territorial health departments on how to engage in policy and policymaker education safely and effectively. By providing an overview of policy basics and options, and building skills to navigate policy, NCSD strives to demystify policy work and empower STI program staff to effectively implement feasible and relevant policy goals.

**The Policy Academy has several learning objectives for participants:**

- Learn policy basics and legislative and non-legislative options
- Learn how to confidently engage in policy and policymaker education
- Gain skills to address public health program challenges through policy
- Understand how to leverage partnerships and coalitions
- Develop messaging that resonates with various audiences
- Understand how to evaluate policy quality and effectiveness

In addition to one-on-one technical assistance throughout the Policy Academy, NCSD assists participants with activities such as policy strategy development, factsheet creation, messaging, and more. [Learn More](#)

