

TOLU(LLAH) ONI

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[Google Scholar](#) | [ORCID ID](#) | [Wikipedia page](#)

PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIAN AND URBAN EPIDEMIOLOGIST

Proven record of building field of urban health research in Africa and globally. Published over 100 academic papers on infectious diseases, multimorbidity, urban and planetary health. Adept at spanning boundaries between disciplines and sectors. Lead transdisciplinary intersectoral research to support healthy public policies globally. Raised over GBP 8 million in funding to conduct intersectoral urban health research on projects on health, climate and the built, natural and food environments. Trained and mentored transdisciplinary researchers and practitioners across disciplines and sectors globally. Keynote speaker at global academic (e.g., International Conference on Urban Health), policy (e.g., US Congressional briefing on science diplomacy), public (e.g., Nobel Prize dialogues) and multilateral organisations (e.g., United Nations and World Economic Forum Davos) meetings.

Skills & Areas of Expertise

Transdisciplinary participatory, systems-based research methods | Policy analysis | Mixed methods epidemiological methods | Spatial epidemiological methods | Intersectoral mixed methods on built environments and health | Agenda and priority setting | Field building | Strategy development and implementation | Organisational development | Adaptive leadership | Complexity thinking | Systems building | Partnership development | Policy advocacy | Network and alliance building and connecting | Public speaking and engagement | Consensus building | Convening and collaboration | Team recruitment, building and motivation | Inclusive capacity strengthening | Science Diplomacy | Cultural dexterity.

EDUCATION

Medical training

Postgraduate medical specialisation in Public Health Medicine (On public health medicine specialist register in UK (GMC number 6103397) and South Africa).

Member of the Royal College of Physicians, UK.

Member of the Faculty of Public Health, UK.

Fellow of the College of Public Health Medicine, South Africa

Medical degree (MBBS), University College London, UK.

Research training

Doctoral degree in Clinical Epidemiology, Imperial College London, UK.

Master's degree in Public Health and Epidemiology, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Master's degree in Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (RESEARCH)

MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge, UK

Clinical (Full) Professor of Global Public Health and Sustainable Urban Development & Programme Lead of the [Global Diet and Physical Activity Research Group](#) | 2022-present [Clinical Director of Research, 2021-Oct 2023; Clinical Senior Research Associate, 2018-2021]

Lead NIHR-funded multi-country consortium ([GDAR Network](#)) on urban policy and environmental determinants of diet and physical activity in South Africa, Kenya, Cameroon, Jamaica, and Haiti.

Convene a new Global Health module of MPhil degree in Population Health Sciences.

Honorary Public health consultant, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

Key achievements

Developed and directed new strategy and pivoted research group to focus on a systems-approach to urban and planetary health.

Effectively communicated new vision and research strategy, gaining buy-in from the global team around this strategy, with strong emphasis of collaboration and co-production with global partners.

Secured almost GBP 4 million for these new projects over two years.

Developed new participatory research methods including innovative citizen science data collection methods with adolescents in Africa and the Caribbean.

Established new research and practitioner partnerships in Africa and Latin America.

Lead a global team of researchers across 7 countries and 3 continents including use of digital communication platforms.

Recruited and built new team.

Conceptualised and designed new curriculum for Global Health stream of a new MPhil degree in Population Health Sciences.

Supervise 3 PhD students from Cameroon, Zimbabwe and Indonesia conducting urban health research.

School of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Extraordinary (Full) Professor | 2022-2025

School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Honorary Associate Professor | 2018-2023

School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Associate Professor | 2016-2018 [Senior Lecturer, 2014-2016]

Established and led the first urban health research group in the city: Research Initiative for Cities Health and Equity group.

Convened and transformed the public health undergraduate curriculum for the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Retain Honorary Associate Professor affiliation since 2018.

Key achievements

Supervised 5 PhD and 6 MPH students to completion between 2016-2021.

Played a critical role in advancing scholarship in the nascent field of urban health research in Africa.

Designed new Health in Context curriculum that introduced a health in all policies approach to disease prevention into medical curriculum.

Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Senior Research Medical Officer | 2010-2014 [Research Medical Officer, 2007-2010]

Led Cape Town site for European Union-funded multi-site tuberculosis diagnostics study.

Established a new TB vaccine trial site and led multisite trial in HIV-positive adults.

Initiated new research focus in group on infectious/non-communicable disease multimorbidity.

Acquired foundational research skills and experience including community-based data collection, community engagement, quantitative and qualitative study design and data analysis.

Key achievements

Recruited and built a multidisciplinary diverse and motivated research team of 40 people across several sites in Cape Town.

Designed and developed a new research site that was able to conduct a Phase IIb clinical trial within 3 years.

TB diagnostics study findings improved understanding of the biology of TB and provided a range of transcriptional

biomarkers with potential as diagnostic and prognostic tools to combat the TB epidemic. Findings were published in Nature.

Secured funding to expand research focus to HIV/non-communicable disease multimorbidity.

CAREER NOTE: Previous clinical positions include Western Cape Government Department of Health, South Africa (Public health Registrar); HIV/Genitourinary medicine at St Mary's hospital, London (Senior house Officer); General Medicine and Emergency Medicine at Royal North Shore hospital, Sydney (Senior house Officer); General Medicine at Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (House Officer).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (SCIENCE/POLICY/SOCIETY INTERFACE)

UrbanBetter | Oni et al <https://urbanbetter.science/>

Founder & Principal | 2020-present

Launched this Africa-led, Youth-privileged, Science-based and Equity-centred initiative in the midst of the pandemic to catalyse and accelerate transformation of African cities for planetary health. The initiative is a learning collaborative, advocacy platform and urban health practice to increase the supply of health from place and increase the demand for healthy sustainable places.

Key achievements

Established the [Cityzens](#), a citizen scientists for planetary health initiative harnessing urban infrastructure for planetary health through the [food we eat](#), our places and spaces and the [food we eat](#). In the first year of this initiative, the [Cityzens for Clean Air campaign](#) was implemented across three cities in Africa reaching almost 2 million people and exhibited at COP27.

Secured funding to scale the Cityzens initiative from multiple funders.

Global Young Academy

Co-Chair | 2017-2019

Co-led this organisation comprising >400 members and alumni from over 80 countries on every continent and a secretariat of 6 staff in Halle, Germany (annual budget EUR 500,000).

Co-led an executive committee of 9 members from 4 continents including priority setting and ensuring implementation of 12-month mission and programme of work aligned to strategic plan.

Key achievements

Secured permanent funding from German government to support secretariat and core projects in perpetuity. This decision was informed by the findings from the impact evaluation.

Directed and led development of a new five-year strategic and action plan including setting out a new vision for the next 10 years.

Instigated and shepherded process that resulted in the Academy being admitted as a member of the InterAcademy Partnership, an umbrella organisation of Academies of Sciences globally.

Contributed strategic direction and advice towards the successful merger of the International Council of Science and the International Social Science Council.

Built new partnerships with global science policy organisations including UNESCO and representation at the UN High Level Political Forum.

Successfully advocated for a permanent position for a young scientist representative on the governing board of the World Science Forum to facilitate inclusion and intergenerational dialogue.

UK Government Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) Ethnicity sub-committee

Member | 2020-present

Participated in fortnightly meetings, providing input that fed into advice to the main SAGE committee that advises the UK government.

Key contributions

Co-led paper submitted to SAGE on housing exposures and COVID-19 health inequalities.

Africa Development Bank's Africa Development Institute

Member | Global Community of Practice, 2020-present

Participated in policy webinars on building resilient inclusive systems for health in post-COVID Africa.

Peer review editor for the Matrix of policy options publication.

Key contributions

Gave presentation that proposed a Marshall plan for health.

Contributions to the policy webinar were included in the final [Matrix of policy options output](#) circulated to all member states. These included the idea that all Ministers should have a planetary health portfolio, the need for a Marshall plan, on intersectoral action for planetary health, a focus on youth, promoting a culture of science.

STRATEGIC ADVISORY POSITIONS

UN FCCC / UN DESA

Member, Expert Group on Climate Change and SDG synergies, 2023-present

Virchow Foundation for Global Health

Member of the Council, 2023-present

Wellcome Trust

Consultant, Climate and Health strategy development, 2021.

World Obesity Federation

Member, Prevention and Policy committee, 2020-present.

Commissions

Commissioner, Lancet Pathfinders Commission: Pathways to Net-zero by 2050, 2020-present.

Commissioner, Global Commission for Post-Pandemic Policy, 2020-present.

Commissioner, Lancet Nigeria commission, 2019-present.

World Economic Forum

Co-Chair, Global Future Council on Clean Air, 2023-present (member since 2019).

Member, Global Future Council on Precision Medicine 2017-2019.

Member, Social Determinants of Health programme, 2020.

Member, Africa Strategic Group, 2018-2020.

Future Earth

Advisory council member, 2018-present.

World Health Organization

Scientific Adviser, Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health, 2018.

International Science Council

Scientific steering committee member, Urban Health and Wellbeing Programme, 2016-present.

Journal Editorial Boards

PLOS Global Health (Planetary health section co-lead), 2021-present.

Lancet Planetary health, 2017-present.

Journal of Urban Health, 2016-present.

Cities and Health, 2017-present.

LEADERSHIP IN ADVANCING SCHOLARSHIP AND THOUGHT

A comprehensive long list including public, media and policy speaking engagements can be viewed [here](#). Highlights include:

Marshall plan for Planetary health, 2020: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/marshall-plan-health-cities-future-environment-urban/>.

Future-proofing health and health-proofing future of cities, 2019: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0788-5>.

AWARDS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Fellowships

Fellow, International Science Council, 2022

Elected Fellow, Wolfson College, Cambridge, 2020.

Next Generation Foresight Practitioner, Africa award, 2020.

Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum, 2019-present.

Elected Fellow, African Academy of Sciences, 2019.

Fellow, Salzburg Global Seminar 2018.

Fellow, Next Einstein Forum 2016.

Alumna, Global Young Academy (elected member 2016-2021).

Profiles

British Medical Journal. Tolu Oni: Working on Africa's Health. BMJ 2019; 364.

Science 2018. 360:6387;pp391-392. Africa cultivates innovation to boost global reach.

Lancet 2016. 387:1712. "Tolullah Oni, Public Health specialist with a global ambition".

RECENT GRANT FUNDING (SELECTION)

Over GBP 8 million raised. A selection of recent grants include:

Unorthodox Philanthropy

UrbanBetter pre-seed funding | 2023 | \$ 300 000

Fondation Botnar

Children Cities and Climate | 2023 | \$ 1 300 000

US Department of State

Clean Air Africa Network: 2022 | \$ 440 000

Clean Air Fund

Scaling Cityzens for Clean Air | July 2023-June 2025 | \$ 300 000

Cityzens for Clean Air | June- Dec 2022 | \$ 142 000

National institute for Health Research, UK

A syndemic planetary health approach to the prevention of diet- and activity-related NCDs | 2021-2025 | UK GBP 3 000 000

ACADEMIC INVITED SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS (SELECTION)

Speaker, COP 26 and COP27

Panel speaker, WHO Hard Talk: How COVID-19 has affected NCD control in cities, Oct 2021.

Invited speaker, 6th World Heart Summit, Time to Act on Obesity, Oct 2021.

Keynote speaker, World Obesity Forum (coalition of the World Obesity Federation, UNICEF and WHO), Sept 2021.

Keynote speaker, International Conference on Urban Health, June 2021.

Invited speaker, Royal Society of Medicine conference: Climate change and health, March 2021.

Invited speaker, Cambridge Climate Change Lecture Series, March 2021.

Invited presenter and panellist, Commonwealth conference: Healthy Sustainable recovery, Jan 2021.

Keynote speaker, Pontifical Academy of Sciences conference

POLICY-RELATED SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS (SELECTION)

Speaker, World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting, Davos, Switzerland, 2018, 2022 and 2023

Keynote speaker, Re-thinking health, re-imagining the urban. WIRED Health Summit

Keynote speaker, Catalysing and accelerating a re-imagination of the "Urban" for healthy climate-resilient cities AfriCities summit May 2022

Keynote speaker, 9th Lagos International Climate Summit Aug 2022

Panellist, The New York Times + Wellcome Trust at COP26.

Panel Speaker, Science for Peace: Successes and Future Possibilities, World Science Forum, Budapest, Nov 2019.

Panellist, Nobel Prize dialogues. Theme: Towards Health_ equality, responsibility, research. Organised by the Nobel Foundation.

Keynote speaker, World Health Summit, Berlin 2019, October 2019.

Lead discussant, UN High Level Political Forum, UN Headquarters, New York, July 2017.

PUBLICATIONS (SELECTION; FULL LIST OF >100 ARTICLES ON [GOOGLE SCHOLAR](#))

1. Gabriel Okello, Rebecca Nantanda, Babatunde Awokola, Meelan Thondoo, Deo Okure, Lamed Tatah, Engineer Bainomugisha, **Tolu Oni**. Air quality management strategies in Africa: A scoping review of the content, context, co-benefits and unintended consequences. *Environment International*, Volume 171, 2023, 107709.
2. Ibrahim Abubakar, Sarah L. Dalglish, Blake Angell, Olutobi Sanuade, Seye Abimbola, Aisha Adamu, Ifedayo M. O. Adetifa, Tim Colbourn, Folabi Ogunlesi, Obinna Onwujekwe, Eme Owoaje, Iruka Okeke, Adebawale Adeyemo, Gambo Aliyu, Muktar H Aliyu, Sani H Aliyu, Emmanuel Ameh, Belinda Archibong, Alex Ezeh, Muktar A Gadanya, Chikwe Ihekweazu, Zubairu Iliyasu, Aminatu Kwaku Chiroma, Diana Mabayoje, Sambo Mohammed Nasir, Stephen Obaro, Adesola Ogunleye, Friday Okonofua, **Tolu Oni**, Olu Onyimadu, Muhammed Pate, Babatunde L. Salako, Faisal Shuaib, Fatimah Tsiga-Ahmed, Fatima Zanna. The Lancet Nigeria Commission: Investing in health and the future of the nation. *The Lancet*. 2022; 399: 1155–200.
3. **Tolu Oni**, Taibat Lawanson, Ebele Mogo. The case for community-based approaches to integrated governance of climate change and health: perspectives from Lagos, Nigeria. *Journal of the British Academy*. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/009s7.007>.
4. Amy Weimann, Noxolo Kabane, Tracy Jooste, Anthony Hawkrige, Warren Smit, **Tolu Oni**. Health through human settlements: Investigating policymakers' perceptions of human settlement action for population health improvement in urban South Africa. *Habitat International* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2020.102203>.
5. **T. Oni**. Future-proofing health and health-proofing the future of cities. *Nature Medicine* 2020; 26:304.
6. J. Jaime Miranda, Tonatiuh Barrientos-Gutiérrez, Camila Corvalan, Adnan A. Hyder, Maria Lazo-Porras, **Tolu Oni**, Jonathan C. K. Wells. Understanding the rise of cardiometabolic diseases in low- and middle-income countries. *Nature Medicine* 2019;25:1667-1679.
7. **Tolu Oni**, Ebele Mogo, Aliko Ahmed, Justine Davies. Breaking down the silos of Universal Health Coverage: from building health systems to building systems for health for primary prevention of non-communicable disease in Africa. *BMJ Global Health* 2019;4(4):e001717.
8. **Tolu Oni**, John S Yudkin, Sharon Fonn, Philip Adongo, Margaret Kaseje, Ademola Ajuwon, Lesley Doyal, Leslie London. Global public health starts at home -Public health approaches to global health training. *Lancet Global Health*. 2019;7(3):e301-e302. doi: 10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30558-8.
9. ****Tolu Oni**, Warren Smit, Richard Matzopoulos, Jo Hunter Adams, Michelle Pentecost, Andrea Rother, Zulfah Albertyn, Farzaneh Behroozi, Olufunke Alaba, Mamadou Kaba, Claire van der Westhuizen, Maylene Shung King, Naomi S Levitt, Susan Parnell, Estelle V Lambert and RICHE members. Urban health research in Africa: themes and priority research questions. *Journal of Urban Health*. 2016;93(4):722-30.