



### **About**

The Sasakawa Emerging Experts Delegation (SEED) is a program developed by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA), a non-partisan non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to deepening the understanding of and strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Japan for the benefit of a free and open international community.

Given the increased focus on public health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration on establishing best practices on public health has become a focus of international relations, including national security. As the U.S. and Japan have entered a new phase of COVID-19 infections, there are opportunities for experts from the two sides to learn from their respective experiences and strengthen their relationship and preparation for the next pandemic.

The 2022 SEED program will bring together nine American public health professionals to travel to Tokyo to deepen their understanding of Japanese perspectives on the COVID-19 response, and the principles and goals behind the Japanese government and medical community's handling of the pandemic. The delegation will meet with Japanese federal, prefectural, and local politicians and officials, public health experts, health security scholars, journalists, and health practitioners. This will provide participants with the opportunity to grow their own understanding for how to address future global health crises and foster collaboration with Japan.

### **Participants**

- **Federal Government**
  1. **Ms. Natalie de Graaf**, Bio-Lead and Strategy Lead, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), Division of Strategy
  2. **Ms. Catherine Evans**, Interdisciplinary Scientist, HHS-ASPR
  3. **Dr. Barbara Knust**, Asia Program Director, Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
  4. **Ms. Alana Morrell**, Interdisciplinary Scientist, HHS-ASPR
  5. **Dr. Christopher L. Perdue**, MD, MPH, Captain, U.S. Public Health Service, Senior Policy Analyst and National Advisory Committee Executive Director, HHS-ASPR
- **State Government**
  6. **Dr. Matthew Donahue**, State Epidemiologist, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
  7. **Ms. Alyssa Merski**, MPH, MA, Senior Analyst – Social and Behavioral Health, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)
- **U.S. Media**
  8. **Ms. Amanda Sealy**, Senior Producer for Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Cable News Network (CNN)
- **U.S. Think Tank/Academia**
  9. **Ms. Rishika Desai**, Senior Associate, Milken Institute Center for Public Health

## **Federal Government**



### **Natalie de Graaf, MPH, MS**

Bio-Lead and Program Analyst, Division of Strategy  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Natalie de Graaf serves as the biological lead within the ASPR- Strategy Team to strengthen and build national preparedness and response capabilities for future and evolving threats. Her primary focus within ASPR centers has been the public health supply chain efforts, including

contributing to the development and writing of the National Strategy for a Resilient Public Health Supply Chain. She came to ASPR after serving as Senior Program Manager and Technical Expert with the non-profit CRDF Global, where she led a large international team in overseeing complex global health and biosecurity programs around the globe with a strong focus on national security preparedness and response. Prior to CRDF Global, Natalie spent five years at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Laboratory Systems, Quality and Safety Systems Branch where she led the development and implementation of national level policies, guidelines, and programs for foreign governments in formulating national biosafety and biosecurity technical regulations and oversight programs. Natalie has worked in over 36 nations throughout her career, spanning from national to local levels engaging ministries and institutions. Natalie received her MPH in Global Public Health Leadership and Management from NYU, and an M.S. in Science and Technology Policy and BS in Biochemistry with Medicinal Chemistry from Arizona State University.



### **Catherine Evans, MPH**

Interdisciplinary Scientist, Division of Requirements  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Catherine Evans is an Interdisciplinary Scientist with the Division of Requirements within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. She is an environmental health generalist with expertise in natural disasters and public health consequences of environmental exposure. Currently, Ms. Evans is engaged in strategic planning for the Public Health Emergency

Medical Countermeasures Enterprise advisory body and she serves as the content co-lead to renew ASPR's Emergency Support Function 8 capability-based requirements. Prior to joining ASPR, she was an Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) Research Fellow with the National Center for Environmental Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In that role, she supported response and recovery efforts for the 2017 and 2018 hurricane seasons. Ms. Evans graduated from the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in 2017 with a Master of Public Health in Global Environmental Health. There, she worked on a variety of projects ranging from lead hazard education for children to the differential impact of environmental exposures on HIV positive individuals. As part of her graduate studies, Ms. Evans worked in the Laboratory for Exposure Assessment and Development in Environmental Research (LEADER) focusing on protocols for heavy metal extraction from various biological sample types. Her undergraduate work in Anthropology and Biology at Sewanee: The University of the South focused on the intersection of culture and medicine.



**Barbara Knust, DVM, MPH, DACVPM**

Asia Program Director

Division of Global Migration and Quarantine

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Barbara Knust, DVM, MPH, is the Asia Field Program Director for the Division of Global Migration in CDC's National Center for Emerging, Zoonotic, and Infectious Diseases. She relocated to Bangkok, Thailand in October 2018, where the team works to ensure high quality medical

exams and preventive services provided to ensure the health of US-bound refugees and immigrants throughout Southeast Asia, and supports regional activities relating to travel medicine and border health. Currently, the team is supporting the Coronavirus response through developing surveillance at displaced person camps and in-migrant worker populations in Thailand and supporting border health in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. Dr. Knust also served as CDC's response team lead in Tokyo, Japan during the February 2020 Diamond Princess cruise ship response. Previously, Dr. Knust worked from 2009-2018 in CDC's Viral Special Pathogens Branch, where she was a subject matter expert in zoonotic viruses and viral hemorrhagic fevers. She was engaged in several leadership positions during the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola response. Dr. Knust has a veterinary degree from Michigan State University, and a Master's in Public Health from the University of Minnesota. She is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, and a Commander in the US Public Health Service.



**Alana Morrell, MPH**

Interdisciplinary Scientist

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Alana Morrell is an Interdisciplinary Scientist in the Office of Strategy, Policy, Planning and Requirements in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), where she contributes her knowledge and understanding of capability-based requirements, strategy development, and legislative authorities. She has over 5 years of experience working in the public health preparedness space, through which she contributed to the latest iteration of the National Health Security Strategy. In addition to her preparedness experience, Ms. Morrell evaluated environmental health programs, such as the Toxics Release Inventory Program, while serving as a Health Scientist within the Office of the Inspector General at the Environmental Protection Agency. Ms. Morrell received a Master of Public Health from George Washington University and conducted research on the preconception health of African American women as part of her studies. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Florida.



**CAPT Christopher L. Perdue, MD, MPH**

Senior Policy Analyst

National Advisory Committees Executive Director

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

CAPT (Dr.) Christopher Perdue is currently a senior policy analyst in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) in Washington, DC. Focusing on public health emergency preparedness, response policy, and capacity building for national and global health security, CAPT Perdue serves as the Executive Director for the National Advisory Committees Program and Designated Federal Official for the National Biodefense Science Board. CAPT Perdue is actively involved in public health and medical emergency response activities in the United States, routinely serving in the role of Chief Medical Officer for the HHS Incident Management Team when deployed. He maintains board certification in General Preventive Medicine/Public Health.

## **State Government**



### **Matthew Donahue, MD**

Internal Medicine Physician Acting State Epidemiologist  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Matt grew up and completed medical school in Iowa, traveled to Upstate New York for internal medicine, and returned to the Midwest (Nebraska) for fellowship in applied epidemiology through CDC called the Epidemic Intelligence Service. In addition to treating patients, Matt has found great joy and intrigue in applied epidemiology and global health. Domestically he has supported responses to gastrointestinal and respiratory disease outbreaks, developed a surveillance system for EVALI (e-cigarette or vaping-related lung injury), developed airport screening protocol for COVID-19 at LAX, completed the case investigation for the 3rd COVID-19 case in the US, supported Nebraska local health departments in their COVID-19 investigations, helped lead testing studies and expanding testing initiatives and investigations across Nebraska, and led the development of variant of concern, reinfection, and vaccine breakthrough surveillance systems. Internationally he has worked on HIV and opportunistic infections in South Africa, helped develop a global health program in rural Peru, and led epi teams during the polio response in Ghana. In addition to continuing work on the COVID-19 response in Nebraska, he enjoys spending time with my wife Brooke and one year old daughter Maeve.



### **Alyssa Merski, MA, MPH**

Senior Analyst  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Alyssa currently serves as a Senior Analyst on the Social and Behavioral Health team at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), supporting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) program. Previously, Alyssa interned with the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and Senate Foreign Relations Committees, several congressional offices, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Alyssa also interned with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Global Affairs. Alyssa received Bachelor's Degrees in both Foreign Relations and East Asian Studies from the University of Virginia, as well as a Master's in Asian Studies (China concentration) from Georgetown University's graduate School of Foreign Service and a Master's in Public Health (Global Health Policy) from the George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health. Alyssa resides in Northern Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C. She enjoys traveling, playing tennis, spending time with family, exploring new restaurants, and rooting for the Washington sports teams.

## **U.S. Media**



**Amanda Sealy**  
Senior Producer  
CNN Health

Amanda Sealy is an award-winning senior producer for CNN. Since 2005, Amanda has covered a wide range of stories starting her career covering Hurricane Katrina as a video journalist. Inevitably, she followed her passion for international news and spent over a decade working for CNN International included a stint in the network's Hong Kong bureau. Her reporting has ranged from producing longform travel documentaries to covering breaking news like the disappearance of MH370. Currently she is CNN Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta's senior producer working hand-in-hand with him to deliver premier health reporting on all CNN platform.

## **U.S. Think Tank/Academia**



**Rishika Desai, MPH**  
Senior Associate  
Center for Public Health Milken Institute

Rishika Desai is a Senior Associate with the Milken Institute – Center for Public Health, supporting the organization's prevention initiatives. Her goal is to engage stakeholders in actionable, evidence-based policy solutions to improve health outcomes and reduce disease burden through health equity and quality improvement approaches. Prior to Milken Institute, Desai worked as a Senior Analyst at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. In this role, Desai provided technical assistance to state and territorial health departments on the topics of overdose prevention, public health infrastructure, and quality improvement. Desai earned a Master of Public Health degree from George Washington University, holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from Arizona State University, and is certified ASQ – Quality Improvement Associate.