


Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba and raised in British Columbia, Deb Lester is a visionary leader and clinician. She has lived and worked around the world gathering experience both on the frontline and in executive leadership in the health, education, and social service sectors.

She began her career working as a Registered Nurse for the Island Health Authority on Vancouver Island and at BC Children's Hospital. Her desire to serve those most in need flourished through an opportunity to provide support within the Reproductive, Maternal Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH) continuum of care in Bermuda. A six-month placement quickly turned into 10 years. The women who Deb worked alongside for ten years, themselves expert clinicians from around the world, helped cultivate the practice and philosophy of care that would characterize the rest of her career.



DEB LESTER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER

Upon moving to Seattle, and alongside her continuing RMNCH at Seattle Children's Regional Hospital, Deb spent time volunteering for an international development NGO working to strengthen RMNCH and social services in East Africa and South Asia. This experience enabled her to both deliver critical care through multiple streams as well as grow and strengthen programs for the most vulnerable. In the early 2000s Deb left the health

“Youth services are the challenge of our time.”

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authority setting to spearhead work internationally. Her work went on to involve building and strengthening health systems, working with rural and remote communities and working with many youth who had been orphaned, made homeless or become victims of human trafficking. She worked in development and brokered substantial global partnerships, uniting parties through a shared mission.

Over the years Deb moved into executive leadership positions leading programs both domestically and globally. Through Deb's extensive work internationally, she began working with and advising many other international development organisations working on implementation, policy and advocacy towards health and social services in RMNCH. This included a focus on

innovating health technology for low resource settings and, through this work, was an external advisor for the UN's Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) Health Innovation Marketplace.

In 2015 these relationships led to Deb working closer within the EWEC initiative, spearheaded by the UN, and joining the UN General Assembly at the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals. Deb continues to work with UN partners and international development organizations to this day.

In 2018 Deb returned to North America to become the Associate Chief Nursing Officer of Seattle Children's Regional Hospital. She led the team to both strengthen health services and ensure that the community had access to them. It was during this time that she was nominated to the Steering Committee for Women in Global Health Seattle, an official partner of the WHO.

Deb has always remained close to her Canadian roots and throughout her career has worked closely with many Canadian organizations. In 2020 Deb felt home calling and, as the pandemic approached, she was asked to join the Canadian Red Cross as their Director of Health Services. Deb partnered with others globally on the pandemic response and joined webinars across Africa and Asia as part of a consortium addressing low-resource locations that needed training and support in the treatment of COVID 19, including basic medical equipment such as the reserves of oxygen. Within Canada, and on behalf of the Red Cross, she built health teams, led work and created partnerships, including with the Ministry of Health, as part of a united

response to the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic her work incorporated a range of programs focused on community health and wellness in areas such as, opioid harm reduction, recovery from fire and flood events, and isolated community members.

In addition to a degree in Nursing, Deb holds both a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Business Administration with roles both as an Adjunct Professor at the University of British Columbia and as a Sessional Instructor at the University of Victoria teaching Global & Public Health and Leadership & International Development. Deb is co-chair of the Canadian Women

“She is committed to those young people who are experiencing homelessness, those at-risk for homelessness and those who have experienced human trafficking.”

ALLAN SECKEL
BOARD CHAIR,
COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER

in Global Health. She is a member of the Canadian College of Health Leaders and in 2021 was inducted by the Canadian Association for Global Health as a Leader in Global Health. In May 2023, she was a delegate at the 76th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

Deb is a wife and mother to 3 children.