



WashU Bursky Public Health

Executive Director, Ryan Institute for Interdisciplinary Health Solutions
Washington University in St. Louis, Bursky School of Public Health
St. Louis, Missouri

THE SEARCH

The [Bursky School of Public Health at Washington University in St. Louis](#) (WashU) seeks a dynamic, entrepreneurial leader to serve as the Executive Director of the [Ryan Institute for Interdisciplinary Health Solutions](#) (Ryan Institute). This is an opportunity to build and lead a truly transformative, multidisciplinary program, established on the belief that the most complex global health challenges require integrated, cross-sector solutions.

The Ryan Institute is dedicated to advancing solutions to the world's most pressing public health challenges. Guided by a vision of a world where public health solutions are scaled globally to improve the health of all people, the Institute unites faculty, policymakers, industry partners, and thought leaders around a shared purpose. Its mission is to develop actionable, scalable solutions through [interdisciplinary research](#), high-level engagement, and cross-sector collaboration. What distinguishes the Ryan Institute is its commitment to translation, with funding, mentorship, postdoctoral support, and global convenings designed to move promising ideas into practice. By connecting scholarship with implementation, the Institute is positioned to drive lasting public health improvements.

Partnered with [Dean Sandro Galea](#) and backed by strong institutional commitment and significant philanthropic investment, this Executive Director is positioned at the forefront of a bold idea: to move beyond traditional academic silos and create a collaborative operating environment that unites expertise across the university and with global partners in government, NGOs, and the private sector. The impact is intended to extend far beyond scholarship—advancing practical, implementable solutions that improve lives, extend longevity, and drive measurable societal outcomes.

The successful candidate is both strategic and creative, translating an ambitious, startup-like institute into a sustainable, high-impact engine for change over time. This leader will play a critical role in shaping the institute's trajectory, establishing the conditions for long-term success, and guiding its focus toward addressing a defined set of the world's most pressing health challenges. Success in this role will be measured by the ability to foster collaboration, build credibility across diverse stakeholders, and create a culture that empowers others to lead and innovate. Under strong leadership, momentum is building around this new school of public health. This is a career-defining role for a leader motivated by impact—someone who sees the opportunity to help position the institute as a “crown jewel” that demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary collaboration to solve problems of global consequence.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Founded in 1853, Washington University (WashU) is nationally and internationally renowned for fostering excellence and creativity in teaching, research, scholarship, patient care, and service to society. WashU invests in the highest quality of both undergraduate and graduate education and has established distinctive programs in nine schools: [Arts & Sciences](#), [Brown School](#) (Social Work), [Bursky School of Public Health](#), [McKelvey School of Engineering](#), [Olin Business School](#), [Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts](#), [School of Continuing & Professional Studies](#), [School of Law](#), and [School of Medicine](#). WashU educates approximately 15,000 full-time students, divided almost equally between undergraduate and graduate/professional students. Over 90 fields of study lead to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in a broad spectrum of traditional and interdisciplinary fields. WashU spans two main campuses—the [Danforth Campus](#) and the [Medical Campus](#).

Washington University in St. Louis is guided by Here and Next, Chancellor [Andrew Martin](#)'s strategic vision to strengthen the university's academic distinction, expand access to its world-class educational experience, and deepen its partnerships and impact across the St. Louis region. As one of the nation's leading research universities, WashU fosters interdisciplinary collaboration to address complex societal challenges and translate discovery into real-world impact. Located within one of the country's most dynamic research and innovation ecosystems, WashU serves as both an academic and economic anchor for the St. Louis region. The university brings together faculty, students, clinicians, community partners, industry, philanthropy, and government to advance research, education, and innovation that improve health and well-being locally and globally.

WashU's FY 2025 operating revenues exceeded \$5.2 billion, and its operating expenses were \$4.9 billion. As of June 30, 2025, the market value of the university's endowment was \$14 billion. The current fundraising and engagement campaign, [With You: The WashU Campaign](#), aims to support healthier lives, greater access, and flourishing communities, and produce future-ready leaders through innovative programs. To date, the campaign has raised over \$3 billion of its \$5 billion goal.

THE BURSKY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Since its launch in January 2025, the [Andrew M. and Jane M. Bursky School of Public Health](#) has demonstrated a significant moment of institutional growth and WashU's deepened commitment to advancing population health. Established in response to the growing complexity of global health challenges and informed by lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, the School unifies decades of public health-related work across the university into a cohesive, forward-looking enterprise.

Guided by a vision to ensure all people can live healthier, more fulfilling lives, the School advances health and well-being through interdisciplinary population health science, education, and meaningful local and global impact. It brings together a robust and growing faculty with expertise spanning the biological, clinical, social, behavioral, environmental, and policy sciences and works collaboratively

across Washington University to address the complex factors that shape health. Drawing on partnerships with WashU Medicine, the Brown School, and disciplines including engineering, business, and the social sciences, the School integrates diverse perspectives to generate knowledge and translate it into solutions that improve population health and strengthen communities. The School's [first five-year strategic plan](#) focuses on strengthening faculty and student excellence, advancing interdisciplinary research networks, and deepening local and global partnerships.

Despite its recent founding, the School has quickly gained momentum by building on a broad base of public health research and a university-wide network of investigators. By fall 2025, the School had grown to include more than 63 primary faculty, 121 secondary faculty, 100 staff, and nearly 200 students, reflecting rapid early scale and strong demand. With strengths in areas such as global health, implementation science, health policy, planetary health, and health communication, it serves as a focal point for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation. Its [academic portfolio](#) includes a Master of Public Health with five concentrations, a PhD in Public Health Sciences with specialized tracks, multiple dual-degree programs across disciplines such as business, law, medicine, and social work, and an undergraduate major and minor in Public Health and Society, preparing students to address complex public health challenges while strengthening research capacity and expanding partnerships locally, nationally, and globally.

Since May 2026, the pace of growth has been accelerated by a landmark [\\$200 million philanthropic commitment from the Bursky Family Foundation](#), the largest gift in Washington University's history, enabling expansion of faculty hiring, student support, and research initiatives. This investment supports the development of infrastructure to translate public health evidence into action.

Leadership

[Sandro Galea, MD, DrPH](#), is the Margaret C. Ryan Dean, the Eugene S. and Constance Kahn Distinguished Professor in Public Health, of the Andrew M. and Jane M. Bursky School of Public Health and Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Initiatives at WashU.

A physician, epidemiologist, and widely cited scholar, Galea's work centers on the social and behavioral determinants of health, particularly trauma and population health. He previously served for a decade as dean of the Boston University School of Public Health, where he led significant growth in academic programs and research. He's also held senior leadership roles at Columbia University, the University of Michigan, and the New York Academy of Medicine. He is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and editor-in-chief of *JAMA Health Forum*.

Caitlin Bristow, JD, is the Associate Dean for Institutional Development and External Affairs at the Bursky School of Public Health. As Associate Dean, Caitlin oversees the Ryan Institute and the Public Health Action Labs – both supported by significant philanthropic investments as well as marketing, communications, and public relations for the School. Caitlin joined the WashU Bursky School of Public Health from Columbia

University Mailman School of Public Health, where she was Assistant Dean for External and Board Relations. Prior to Columbia, she spent eight years consulting.

Ryan Institute for Interdisciplinary Health Solutions

One of the most exciting initiatives of the Bursky School, the [Ryan Institute](#), has recently been funded through the generosity of Tony and Ann Ryan. The Institute is a catalyst for transformation: an institute centered in the Bursky School of Public Health and is a hub for advancing interdisciplinary knowledge and fostering sustainable solutions to impact the most pressing health challenges around the globe. Researchers and policymakers are looking for new ways to improve maternal health, strengthen mental well-being, reduce chronic disease, and prepare communities for climate-related risks and challenges, which require solutions that reach beyond any one discipline or sector.

Through an endowment supporting signature initiatives, including annual global summits, seed grants to help interdisciplinary teams pilot promising ideas, and a postdoctoral fellowship program to build the next generation of public health scholars and practitioners, the Institute is designed to attract exceptional talent and incentivize and recognize scholars committed to making sustained, strategic contributions to solving critical challenges.

ROLE AND PRIORITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director will oversee the administration of staff, projects, and functions, building relationships across the School, the University and outside of WashU, while delegating appropriate responsibilities to the team and collaborators. The role includes oversight of postdoctoral fellows and a program coordinator who will assist with the general operation of the Institute, as well as responsibility for developing the Institute's annual budget, including summit costs, in coloration with the team's finance leaders.

The Executive Director will report to the Associate Dean for Institutional Development and External Affairs, who oversees the Ryan Institute, the Public Health Action Labs, and External Affairs, and will work closely with the Dean of the Bursky School of Public Health to execute these priorities:

Lead the vision, strategy, and public health impact of the Institute.

The Executive Director will lead the Ryan Institute by executing its vision and ensuring disciplined execution aligned with the School's 4x4 plan, driving measurable progress and sustained impact. They will partner seamlessly with School leadership, University collaborators, and external stakeholders to advance the Ryan Institute's Blueprint, translating strategy into coordinated action across the Institute. They will work in close collaboration with the Executive Director of the Public Health Action Labs to ensure that insights and innovations generated within the Institute are moved efficiently into implementation, resulting in tangible, real-world outcomes. Through regular assessment and annual review, the Executive Director will continuously refine the strategic plan in response to emerging opportunities, while

maintaining strong, transparent communication with donors, key stakeholders, and WashU leadership to build trust, engagement, and long-term support.

Drive faculty scholarly excellence and postdoctoral fellowship growth.

The Executive Director will oversee a highly competitive, rigorous process to identify and support Ryan Institute Faculty Scholars, including managing the annual call for proposals, convening and guiding the selection committee, and ensuring that scholars are positioned for success and impact. They will cultivate a dynamic and high-performing cohort of postdoctoral fellows by leading the recruitment of two fellows each year, providing training and ongoing mentorship, with a focus on integrating fellows into the Institute's research ecosystem. In partnership with Faculty Scholars, the Executive Director will ensure that postdoctoral fellows meaningfully advance the Ryan Institute's research agenda, contributing to innovation, collaboration, and measurable outcomes that elevate its national profile and impact.

Advance summit strategy, communications, and external engagement.

This leader will work closely with Faculty Scholars to identify themes across pressing public health issues, engage thought partners with leading expertise, and foster an environment that promotes collaboration and innovation. The Executive Director will design and execute an annual summit focused on the work of that year's faculty scholars. They will oversee the Ryan Institute's communications strategy, including website direction and content development, ensuring consistency, quality, and alignment with the Institute's mission and priorities. The Executive Director will ensure accurate, timely reporting of Institute activities, events, and achievements, strengthening the Institute's visibility and reputation. They will also guide the development of key publications—including the annual report, progress reports, white papers, and other scholarly outputs—ensuring these materials reflect the Ryan Institute's impact, amplify its thought leadership, and effectively engage donors, stakeholders, and the broader public health community.

QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIRED SKILLS

A highly qualified and successful candidate will have the following qualifications and skills:

- Master's degree
- 6-8 years of experience
- 2-3 years of experience in a leadership role
- Entrepreneurial in nature, with confident self-motivation to drive projects forward
- A skilled convener who unites stakeholders around shared goals
- Curious, creative, and courageous, yet measured and accountable with high integrity
- Strong project management skills
- Outstanding organizational leadership capabilities
- Strong written and verbal communication skills

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

As the second-largest employer in the metropolitan area and with an [economic impact that totals \\$9.3 billion](#), WashU is an essential institution for St. Louis, and the city's prosperity is essential to WashU. The university has provided innovative leadership, and the entire region counts on the university as a key partner for its success. The St. Louis region boasts a remarkable concentration of world-class research institutions and nationally ranked accelerator programs, making it a magnet for entrepreneurship in both medical and plant sciences. The region's innovation district boasts [Cortex](#), a hub that creates inclusive economic growth in St. Louis by uniting diverse innovators, spaces, and organizations to transform ideas into solutions. The city's rapidly evolving startup community continues to attract new enterprises, talent, and investment, fueled by its moderate cost of living and access to cutting-edge lab space. This unique combination of affordability, advanced infrastructure, and proximity to farmland positions St. Louis as an ideal location for solving critical challenges in healthcare and agriculture.

Beyond its professional appeal, St. Louis offers a high quality of life, consistently ranked among the [most beautiful and affordable places](#) to live and build a career. Its eclectic neighborhoods, rich cultural scene, and vibrant culinary and entertainment offerings provide the perfect blend of big-city excitement and small-town charm. The St. Louis region has excellent schools and offers many opportunities to watch or participate in a wide range of sports, recreational activities, and cultural events. St. Louis is highly accessible, and there are more free, world-class attractions in the city than any place in the U.S. outside of Washington, D.C., largely due to the area's active philanthropic community. Newcomers are often pleasantly surprised by the city's character and livability, making it not only a place to work and innovate but also a place to thrive.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/washington-university-st-louis-school-public-health/executive-director-ryan-institute>

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Washington University encourages and gives full consideration to all applicants for admission, financial aid, and employment. The university does not discriminate in access to, or treatment or employment in,

its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, veteran status, disability or genetic information.

It is the policy of the university to: (1) provide equal employment opportunity to all job applicants and employees; (2) administer recruiting, hiring, compensation and benefit practices, training, upgrading and promotion procedures, transfers and terminations of employment without discrimination because of race, color, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin or ancestry, citizenship, veteran status, disability or genetic information; (3) provide a workplace free from harassment based on any of the foregoing factors; and (4) encourage the hiring of minorities, women, disabled individuals, Vietnam era veterans and disabled veterans.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Washington University in St. Louis, Bursky School of Public Health. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Washington University in St. Louis, Bursky School of Public Health would supersede any conflicting information in this document.