

Inequality in South Australia

KEY DETERMINANTS OF WELLBEING

Volume 1 : The Evidence | 2004

Hetzel D, Page A, Glover J, Tennant S



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Enquiries about or comments on this publication should be addressed to:

PHIDU, The University of Adelaide, South Australia 5005
Phone: 08-8303 6239 or e-mail: PHIDU@publichealth.gov.au

For further information about addressing inequality, contact:

Chief Policy Officer, Health Promotion SA, SA Department of Health
Phone: (08) 8226 6329 or e-mail: John.Gray@health.sa.gov.au

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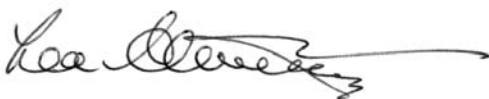
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Foreword

The sustained economic growth created in recent years in Australia and other developed economies has provided increasing levels of wealth and material wellbeing for many people. However, the distribution of these benefits is not spread evenly across the community. There is an increasing awareness and concern in South Australia about how these benefits result in differences in levels of wellbeing. Of more concern, there is evidence that the gap in wellbeing between the well off and the worst off is widening.

Inequality in South Australia – key determinants of wellbeing has been developed as one initiative of the South Australian Government in response to these concerns. This report explains what the social determinants of health and wellbeing are, how differences in these determinants lead to inequality and provides detailed information of how these differences are distributed across South Australia. The relative impact of these social determinants of wellbeing on particular groups, especially on Indigenous South Australians, is described in detail where reliable information is available. In addition, information is provided showing the distribution of these determinants across metropolitan Adelaide and country South Australia.

This report aims to increase understanding of the social determinants of health and wellbeing and build our capacity to reduce inequalities. It will provide planners, community advocates and service providers with information on which to base their decisions and proposals. Addressing the social determinants of health and wellbeing requires action from a wide variety of government and non-government organisations, not just from health and community services agencies. It is an essential component of the South Australian Government's commitment to creating a fair and socially inclusive community. We encourage you to use this report as a key resource in working with your own community to achieve that goal.



Hon Lea Stevens
Minister for Health
Minister Assisting the Premier in
Social Inclusion



Hon Jay Weatherill
Minister for Families and
Communities
Minister for Housing
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Disability

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Overview

The social and economic environment is a major determinant of population wellbeing in South Australia. Over the last fifteen years, numerous reports have highlighted substantial variations in the health and wellbeing of the South Australian population, and a widening of the gap between those who are 'well off' and those who are not.

The purpose of this report, *Inequality in South Australia – key determinants of wellbeing, Volume 1: The Evidence*, is to deepen our understanding of the impact that social, physical and economic factors have on health and wellbeing, and to describe the distribution of some of these factors across the South Australian population.

A number of indicators have been selected to describe different aspects of wellbeing of the population at the present time, and, by using them, to highlight the extent of some of the existing social and economic inequalities. The report contains detailed findings for each of the indicators.

It is intended that a companion volume be published later in 2004, containing examples of projects and programs that have been successful in addressing social inequality.

Key findings

- Across the South Australian population as a whole, there are substantial inequalities in the distribution of aspects of health, wellbeing and education.
- The patterns of variation in the maps and graphs of the indicators of health and wellbeing are very similar to those shown for social and economic inequalities.
- Aboriginal people as a group fare worse on all indicators for which data are available – unemployment, labour force participation, education, life expectancy, health risks, and so on – than non-Aboriginal South Australians.
- The relatively poorer health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people are the result of a complex set of interacting factors, resulting from colonisation and the subsequent socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by them over more than two centuries.
- Across Adelaide, numerous dimensions of inequality are evident. Areas characterised by high proportions of low income families, high unemployment rates and relatively high proportions of Aboriginal people, are also the areas where rates of child abuse and neglect and

smoking during pregnancy are high. These areas have the lowest rates of participation in schooling at age 16 and low labour force participation rates as well.

- In the country areas of South Australia, there is also an association between the indicators of social inequality and those of health and wellbeing; however, this appears weaker than in Adelaide, in part because of the smaller populations in these areas.
- The most notable associations in the country are between areas characterised by high unemployment rates and high proportions of dwellings without a motor vehicle, and areas where rates of child abuse and neglect and smoking during pregnancy are high. Areas with low rates of participation in schooling at age 16 and areas with relatively high proportions of Indigenous population also have high rates of smoking during pregnancy.

These findings paint a concerning picture of social inequality in this State, especially for Aboriginal South Australians who are our most disadvantaged citizens. It is a situation that is both avoidable and unfair, but not inevitable.

There is now substantial evidence that wellbeing is the result of complex interactions of the social, economic, biological and ecological environments in which people live. A lack of enabling social and environmental conditions results in poor outcomes for people. However, if these environments are supportive, they provide a foundation for the development of competence and skills that underpin learning, behaviour, health and wellbeing throughout life.

The findings in this report highlight areas where further action is needed, and there is much that can be done. There is a growing body of knowledge that will provide direction for developing policies to reduce inequities across the population. The socioeconomic environment is a powerful and potentially modifiable factor and public policy is a key instrument to improve this environment, particularly in areas such as housing, taxation and social security, work environments, urban design, pollution control, educational achievement, and early childhood development.

A number of examples of how information about inequalities can underpin the planning and implementing of projects aimed at reducing existing inequities are included in Section 5 of this document.

There are many benefits of investing in a population-based approach: increased prosperity, because a well-functioning and healthy population is a major contributor to a vibrant economy; reduced expenditures on health, education, justice and social problems; and overall community stability and wellbeing for South Australians.

As a community, we need to understand better the complex interactions between individuals, their families, the pressures exerted by their environments and social structures over a lifetime, and how we can influence these factors to improve the wellbeing of current and future generations of South Australians.

Action following on from this report

This report, *Inequality in South Australia – key determinants of wellbeing, Volume 1: The Evidence*, will be distributed widely to South Australian agencies and communities to assist in the development of an understanding of the extent and impact of social inequalities across the State; and to encourage the direction of greater resources to reduce these inequalities.

A second volume, containing examples of projects and programs that have been successful in addressing social inequality, will be published later in 2004. The projects and programs to be included in this companion volume will be identified through sector specific consultation workshops by an across government advisory group.

The Department of Health and Department for Families and Communities will use these two documents to redirect financial and human resources towards this end.

For further information, contact:

Chief Policy Officer
Innovation and Development Team
Health Promotion SA
Department of Health

Phone: 08 8226 6329; Fax: 08 8226 6133.

Project reference group

Reference group membership*

Tony Woollacott (Chair)	Research, Analysis and Evaluation Unit, Strategic Planning and Population Health Division, Department of Human Services
Kay Anastassiadis	Child Protection Review Secretariat, Social Justice and Country Division, Department of Human Services
Rose Bowey	Strategic Development and Communications, Attorney General's Department
Steve Charles	Policy and Research (Community Services), Social Justice and Country Division, Department of Human Services
Leanne Colby	Strategic Policy and Planning, Aboriginal Services Division, Department of Human Services
Chris Gascoigne	Research, Analysis and Evaluation Unit, Strategic Planning and Population Health Division, Department of Human Services
John Glover	Public Health Information Development Unit, University of Adelaide
John Gray	Health Promotion SA, Strategic Planning and Population Health Division, Department of Human Services
Dan Haller	Human Services Reform – Equity and Diversity, Strategic Planning and Population Health Division, Department of Human Services
Diana Hetzel	Public Health Information Development Unit, University of Adelaide
Deborah Keighley-James	Aboriginal Education and Employment Strategies Unit, Department of Education and Children's Services
Anthea Page	Public Health Information Development Unit, University of Adelaide
Debbie Robb	Cross Sectoral Relations, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation
Clare Shuttleworth	Primary Health Planning, Metropolitan Health Division, Department of Human Services
David Waterford	Social Inclusion Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Carmel Williams	Health Promotion SA, Strategic Planning and Population Health Division, Department of Human Services

*Note: Agency names reflect the relevant agencies at the time the project was undertaken.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the Social Inequalities Reference Group were:

1. To contribute to the development of a resource document that would describe the extent of social inequalities in South Australia and their links to health and wellbeing.
2. To provide advice on the indicators that should be used and their presentation in the final report.
3. To review project plans and drafts of the resource document produced by PHIDU.

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