

Health Equity Research and Development Unit (HERDU) – Population Health Research

Access and equity are core values of NSW Health and underpin the Sydney Local Health District's (SLHD) strategic plan. Some populations and places in the District have shorter lives, and higher levels of disability than the NSW average.¹

SLHD and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) are collaborating to pursue an equity agenda. Both are committed to addressing health inequities, to genuinely engage with the community, and to conduct high quality research that informs policy and practice. The Health Equity Research and Development Unit (HERDU) is an embodiment of that collaboration as a unit of the SLHD Clinical Services Integration and Population Health Directorate and a Research Hub of the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity (CPHCE) at UNSW.

Ministry investments in population health research include the Prevention Research Support Program (PRSP) which supports the CPHCE in its resource capacity. This enables HERDU to conduct research, direct application and translation of its research activities into District services. This is in alignment with *Population Health Research Strategy 3.2*, to *develop and maintain research infrastructure* and support service development and quality improvement, including the update of evidence-based interventions and approaches to healthcare.

HERDU contributes to the implementation of SLHD's commitment to equitable access to quality health services for the community and creates opportunities and environments that improve health. HERDU also provides a platform to conduct equity focused research, translate research findings into practice and to support the broader workforce to conduct equity and action-oriented research.

HERDU's flagship, project 'Can Get Health in Canterbury' is a place-based intervention, developed in partnership with UNSW, SLHD and Central and Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network (CESPHN) to improve access to comprehensive primary health care, increase individual and community health literacy, and work with stakeholders to address important social determinants of health.² Key achievements include the employment of a Bangla-speaking and an Arabic-speaking Community Researcher, establishment of the 'Rohingyan Little Local', which allocated \$10,000 to the Australian-Burmese Rohingya Communities to spend according to community priorities, and delivery of numerous community education programs, including a Bangla women's circle. The evaluation demonstrates that improving access to comprehensive primary health care in disadvantaged, urban locations is possible through evidence-informed approaches in partnership with major stakeholders in the region. Building this infrastructure and trust requires genuine community engagement, academic leadership and health services committed to addressing health inequities and provide an investment of resources over decades rather than years.

HERDU is developing a program to improve organisational, professional and community health literacy.³ For example, walking interviews conducted at Canterbury Hospital identified the navigation issues experienced by people who speak a language other than English.⁴ HERDU works with SLHD and Healthdirect to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of a bilingual health literacy intervention for new mothers and grandmothers.

HERDU is also working as part of the Primary and Community Health Cohort Study which involves the innovative use of the 45 and Up data in a de-identified linked set. This enables us to research integrated approaches to primary health care in collaboration is CESPHN and SESLHD.

One of the ways we are translating research into policy and practice is by conducting reviews on the proposed redevelopment of the Waterloo Public Housing Estate. The first focuses on psychological distress associated with redevelopment announcements and waiting to be rehoused. Further topics include social mix, and living with and through demolition and construction. These reviews will be synthesised into Health Impact Assessment reports at different points in the redevelopment of Waterloo.

Further reading

1. Sydney Local Health District. (2017). A framework for improving health equity in Sydney Local Health District. Available at: www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/2017equityFramework.pdf
2. Central and Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network. Can Get Health website. Available at: www.cesphn.org.au/general-practice/help-my-patients-with/can-get-health
3. Lloyd J, Thomas L, Powell-Davies G, Osten R, Harris M. How can communities and organisations improve their health literacy? *Public Health Res Pract* 2018; 28(2): e2821809.
4. Lloyd J, Thomas L, Dennis S, Attenbrow H, Harris E, Wise M, et al. Culturally diverse patient experiences and walking interviews: a co-design approach to improving organisational health literacy. *Health Lit Res Pract* 2019; 3(4): e238-42.