

# Australian Health Inequities Program ■ ■ ■

## Editorial...

We are pleased to present to you the first Newsletter of the **Australian Health Inequities Program (AHIP)**.

The first 6 months of operation of AHIP have been very productive. Our agenda is ambitious – working across two Universities in different states and establishing an agenda on social determinants of health in a world where the health imagination is still firmly wedded to medical and behavioural solutions. We have made some steps towards this agenda through commencing a number of new research projects that are multidisciplinary such as the study of the impact of the closure of an automotive manufacturing plant and an Indigenous location and health project. The AHIP team has also worked on a number of new grant applications. Our team is facing the intellectual challenge of moving outside our comfort zones and learning to accommodate the perspectives of different disciplines. This is in terms of quite different disciplines (such as economics, geography and public health) and also in terms of methodologies (where we are combining epidemiology, qualitative methods and policy analysis). We are finding the underpinning assumptions of these approaches are varied. Our team is committed to exploring these differences and developing genuine research across disciplines that offers more than any one discipline could in isolation.

Our recent retreat is reported on elsewhere in this newsletter and clearly has played an important role in establishing links between researchers interested in health inequities and policy makers and practitioners who are working to implement initiatives that seek to reduce in the inequities. We'd welcome any further ideas on how we might develop these links further .

We will farewell Christine Putland from the AHIP team at the end of the year as she is re-joining the Flinders Department of Public Health teaching team. However she will be available to support and contribute to some future AHIP activities. We would like to thank her for her contribution to AHIP this year.  
*Fran Baum*



## Introducing the Team...



AHIP is headed by four lead investigators Professor Fran Baum, Department of Public Health (DPH, Flinders University), Professor Andrew Beer in the School of Geography, Population and Environmental Management (SEGPEM, Flinders University), Associate Professor Anne Kavanagh, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society (KCWHS, University of Melbourne) and Professor Sue Richardson, Director of the National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS, Flinders University).

The Team Investigators on AHIP include:

- Dr Christine Putland (April-December 2005) and Dr Anna Ziersch based in DPH
- Dr Emma Baker (from October 2005) based in SEGPEM
- Mr Laurence Lester (from 2007) based in NILS
- Ms Lyndal Thomas and Ms Rebecca Bentley based at KCWHS (Melbourne)

## About AHIP...

AHIP has received \$2.4 million funding over 5 years from the National Health and Medical Research Council through a Capacity Building in Population Health Grant. Health inequities remain a significant feature of Australia's health profile. AHIP is committed to strengthening our understanding of the ways in which health inequities are created and sustained in Australia, and in developing more effective ways of reducing these inequities. This requires research into the complex relationships between many factors in people's lives including housing, employment, social connections, and the places and environments in which they live. The findings of the multidisciplinary research will contribute to debates about what level of inequities are acceptable in a country such as Australia and, most importantly, provide guidance to government, service providers and community groups about how to improve the quality of people's local environments and reduce the health differences between different groups of Australians.

Key features of the AHIP program are:

- Building the capacity of individual researchers in the health inequities field to work in a multidisciplinary framework by employing a number of postdoctoral researchers and offering PhD scholarships in key areas of research.
- Creating a broad network of Australian researchers working in health related areas, bringing them together in forums and in national/international conferences on health inequities.
- Strengthening links with the international research community focused on health inequities in the UK, Canada, South Africa, the USA and Ireland.
- Close working relationships with the South Australian Department of Health and VicHealth and Department of Human Services in Victoria to improve policy responses to health inequities.

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## Launch of AHIP...

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2005, the Australian Health Inequities Program (AHIP) was launched in Adelaide by then Minister for Health, Hon Lea Stevens, at Tandanya (the National Aboriginal Cultural Institute).

In her speech, the Minister described AHIP as a 'very exciting program...especially for all of us who are committed to addressing health inequities.' She expressed her firm belief that 'results of this research should inform debate and provide guidance to government, service providers and community groups about how to address these inequities.'



*Pictured above: Lea Stevens*



On 10th of June this year AHIP was also launched at VicHealth in Melbourne, with international AHIP collaborators Ichiro Kawachi and S.V. Subramanian, from Harvard School of Public Health. Launching AHIP Professor Ichiro Kawachi praised the program arguing that it "Holds high promise and is poised to make great breakthroughs in our understanding of inequity".

*Pictured above: Prof. Kawachi, Fran Baum, Anne Kavanagh & S.V. Subramanian*

## 2005 Retreat...

One of the key activities of AHIP is the annual Research Retreat. The purpose of the retreats is to bring together the whole AHIP team to plan collaborative activities and develop methodological approaches with input from outside national and international researchers. An important aspect of the retreat is the opportunity to engage with policy makers about research.

### The Dinner...

Around 60 people attended the AHIP retreat dinner, hosted by the Vice Chancellor of Flinders University of South Australia, Professor Anne Edwards. The dinner brought researchers together with policy makers and practitioners from a range of government sectors. Minister John Hill (Minister for Health, Environment and Conservation, and The Southern Suburbs) and Professor Fran Baum addressed the dinner. Prof Baum described the AHIP program and spoke particularly about its desire to engage users of research on health inequities and about the aim of AHIP to engage in debates about the different forms of evidence that can be used to research the determinants of population health status.



*Invited speakers at the retreat:  
A/Prof. Tony Blakely, Prof. Jennie Popay &  
Dr Jianghong Li*

Feedback from participants at the retreat was very positive, as one person said:

*'It has been a great first retreat for AHIP. The speakers were varied and all made a great contribution to the debate. I have really benefited from the information and discussion. Keep the variety up- the blend of perspectives was terrific.'*

## Retreat Highlights...

The 2005 Australian Health Inequities Program Annual Retreat took place over four days at the St Francis Winery Resort, Old Reynella south of Adelaide in October.

This years retreat was a series of seminars, discussions and a dinner which brought together the core AHIP research group with invited speakers from Australia and overseas, and members of the Australian research and policy community.

### The Seminar Program

Approximately 60 invited Australian researchers attended a seminar program of health inequities recent research and methodology. The following presentations were made:

#### *Professor Jennie Popay:*

- Understanding the relationship between physical space, social space and health inequalities
- The Challenge of Community Engagement in urban renewal

#### *Dr Jianghong Li:*

- Data linkage and research in social determinants of health: methodological and political changes
- How can research in health disparities inform policy: examples from Western Australia.

#### *Associate Professor Tony Blakely:*

- Shifting dollars, saving lives: what might happen to mortality rates, and socio-economic inequalities in mortality rates, if income was redistributed?
- What have policy makers in NZ learnt from record linkage of census and mortality data? The NZ Census-Mortality Study

#### *Associate Professor Anne Kavanagh:*

- The Victorian Lifestyles Neighbourhood Environments Study: Lessons from the field.

#### *Professor Andrew Beer:*

- Impact of an automotive plant closure on the health, housing and labour market careers of displaced workers

## A chance to join the dynamic AHIP team

### RESEARCH FELLOW A/B

Department of Public Health,  
Faculty of Health Sciences,  
Flinders University

### RESEARCH A/B

#### Salary Range:

Research Level A \$46,324 - \$56,421  
Research Level B \$59,393 - \$70,527

#### Reference No: 05330

This position will make a key contribution to the AHIP which is an NHMRC Capacity Building grant across Flinders University and University of Melbourne. The appointee will be engaged in research on the contribution made to health inequities by the labour market, housing and social capital. There is scope for the appointee to pursue their own research agenda within the broader AHIP agenda and to build their research capacity.

This position is available immediately on a full-time basis for up to 4 years depending on level of appointment.

#### Closes:

5.00pm, Monday 19 December 2005

Applications must address the specified selection criteria. Detailed position information (including selection criteria) and essential information for intending applicants are available via the [Jobs@Flinders](mailto:Jobs@Flinders) website: <http://www.flinders.edu.au/employment>

Applications must be lodged with Job Applications, Human Resources, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001.

## Future developments...

The AHIP team will continue to work on our current projects next year and our new initiatives will depend to some extent on the fate of grant applications. One of these involves funding to research the impact of labour market changes on health and to further our work understanding the dynamics of social networks and health inequities. We also hope that two AHIP PhD scholars will start their research next year and are in the process of selecting those scholars.

We also plan to hold a one-day workshop on multi-disciplinary research and health inequities associated with the meeting of the International Society for Equity in Health which will be Adelaide in September 2006 and whose local organisation is being undertaken by the Flinders Department of Public Health. Our annual retreat will be held in Melbourne from 13<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> November 2006. Mark the date in your diary.

## Some Recent Publications...

**Anne Kavanagh**, Jane Goller, Tania King, Damien Jolley, David Crawford and Gavin Turrell (2005) Urban area disadvantage and physical activity: a multilevel study in Melbourne Australia, **Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health**, 59, 934-940

**Fran Baum** (2005) Wealth and health – the need for more strategic public health research, **Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health**, 59, (7), 542-545.

Catherine Palmer, **Anna Ziersch**, Kathy Arthurson, **Fran Baum** (2005) 'Danger lurks around every corner': fear of crime and its impact on opportunities for social interaction in stigmatised Australian suburbs, **Urban Policy and Research**, forthcoming.

**Fran Baum** (2005) Who cares about Health for All in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Editorial **Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health**, forthcoming.

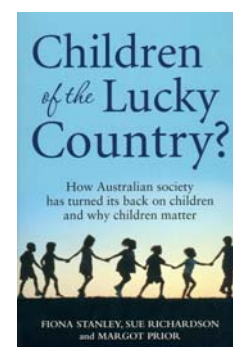
**Anna Ziersch**, **Fran Baum**, Colin MacDougall, **Christine Putland** (2005) Neighbourhood life and social capital: the implications for health, **Social Science and Medicine**, 60, (1), 71-86.

**Anna Ziersch** and Kathy Arthurson (2005) Social networks in public and community housing: the impact on employment outcomes, **Urban Policy and Research**, 23, (4), 427-443.

**Anna M. Ziersch** (2005) The health implications of access to social capital: Findings from an Australian study, **Social Science and Medicine**, 61, 2119-2131.

## Children of the Lucky Country?

AHIP Lead Investigator, Professor Sue Richardson recently published a book with public health expert and 2003 Australian of the Year Fiona Stanley and child and family psychologist Professor Margot Prior. The book, called *Children of the Lucky Country? How Australia has turned its back on children and why children matter*, examines the way we treat our children and sets out the ways that our society can fully realise their potential. It is published by Pan Macmillan.



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