

AHIP Retreat Report

The 2005 Australian Health Inequities Program Annual Retreat took place over four days at the St Francis Winery Resort, Old Reynella, south of Adelaide, from 17th to 20th October.

This year's retreat was a series of planning sessions, 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 invited speakers in attendance were:

Professor Jennie Popay
Institute for Health Research,
Lancaster University, UK

A/Prof Tony Blakely
Wellington School of Medicine and Health Sciences,
University of Otago, New Zealand.

Dr Jianghong Li
Division of Population Sciences
TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth

Here we present a summary of the sessions in chronological order. All presentations were followed by a discussion and questions from attendees.

Monday afternoon (AHIP team only)

The retreat began with a session on team building facilitated by Robin Maslen, a management consultant experienced in team building and organisational planning.

After breaking the ice by introducing each other the team set some ground rules for working together, developed goals and future indicators of success and shared concerns about overcoming potential problems to achieve set goals. The team identified markers of success in the longer term. These were to work as a team, sustain team work, develop work plans (including shared research projects), build the capacity of Team Investigators to become high quality independent researchers, and make important contributions to research and policy.

Tuesday morning (AHIP team and invited guests)

The Tuesday morning session comprised presentations and discussion amongst AHIP team members and visitors about the key areas listed in the AHIP grant application and their impact on health and health inequities. The themes identified were location, social capital, housing careers, labour market status, economic change and public policy, policy analysis and programme and intervention evaluation.

Lyndal Thomas talked about location and spatial dependence. She explained why multi-level modelling is used in population-based studies of health when location is particularly of interest, and outlined a specific problem of how to allow for spatial dependence between areas in multi-level analysis.

Anna Ziersch outlined the way that social capital has been conceived and measured in previous research. She described her own approach to social capital using an example from her PhD research and discussed the relevance of social capital to AHIP's work.

Rebecca Bentley discussed measurement of social capital using social networks. She outlined some approaches used to analyse social network data including the position generator, a measure of access to social resources based on the occupational prestige of network members, and summary measures of ties in ego-networks.

Andrew Beer discussed the relationship between health and housing and Sue Richardson talked about health inequalities and the labour market. Both talks reminded us of the importance of housing careers and work as social determinants of health. Sue also heightened our awareness of the likely negative impact on health of the Industrial Relations reforms currently being introduced in Australia.

Christine Putland discussed approaches to policy analysis in AHIP. She described the phases of policy making and analysis and relevant analytic approaches. She suggested that a range of different approaches including the critical and interpretive approaches would be useful for AHIP along with more flexible models.

Fran Baum talked about evaluation of community-based initiatives designed to address the social determinants of health and health inequities. She described the dominant research paradigms in public health, the strengths and weaknesses of epidemiology and the traditional scientific method, and the need to develop understanding by using different techniques of enquiry.

The session achieved its aims of generating discussion and understanding of disciplines different analytic approaches. Methodological and conceptual issues of common interest were identified.

Tuesday afternoon (AHIP team, invited guests, researchers and policy-makers)

On Tuesday afternoon, the AHIP Team and invited researchers from Flinders and Melbourne University attended a session of presentations by guest speakers and AHIP Lead Investigators. Each presentation was followed by a discussion and questions from the audience. All presentations drew on the results of recent research that the authors were involved in. Prof Sue Richardson chaired the session.

Each of the presentations highlighted the value and also challenges of different research methods.

Professor Jennie Popay: "Understanding the relationship between physical space, social space and health inequalities"

Jennie Popay discussed physical and social space and the differences between them. Her research in this field highlighted the inadequacy of examining physical space alone and the power of qualitative research to unpack individual's relations to their physical and social environments.

Dr Jianghong Li: "Data linkage and research in social determinants of health: methodological and political changes."

Jianghong Li described the extensive data linkage undertaken across multiple disciplines and government sectors by the University of Western Australia and several governmental jurisdictions in Western Australia. She demonstrated how data linkage of this scale usefully described social determinants of health and health inequalities as well as non-health outcomes.

A/Prof Tony Blakely: "Shifting dollars, saving lives: what might happen to mortality rates, and socio-economic inequalities in mortality rates, if income was redistributed?"

Tony Blakely used quantitative methods to model the impact of transferring income from high to low income individuals on overall mortality and inequalities in mortality in New Zealand. He concluded that overall gains in mortality would be modest, but that reduction in inequalities in mortality could be substantial.

Anne Kavanagh and Andrew Beer introduced two important studies included under the AHIP umbrella.

- *A/Prof Anne Kavanagh: “The Victorian Lifestyles Neighbourhood Environments Study: Lessons from the field.”*
Anne Kavanagh described the Victorian Lifestyle and Neighbourhood Environments Study (VICLANES), which examines individual and environmental determinants of healthy behaviours and socio-economic differences in healthy behaviours.
- *Professor Andrew Beer: “Impact of an automotive plant closure on the health, housing and labour market careers of displaced workers”*
Andrew Beer discussed the research into the health, housing and labour market impacts of the closure of the Lonsdale plant of Mitsubishi Motors Australia Ltd (MMAL) in Adelaide. He noted that health impacts are likely to be complex and only emerge in the long term.

The session thus provided a very valuable demonstration of alternative research approaches and the power (and some limitations) of each.

AHIP dinner (AHIP team, invited guests, researchers and policy-makers)

The AHIP team decided to host a dinner during their annual retreat as a means of encouraging informal interaction between policy makers and practitioners from a range of government sectors. Minister John Hill (Minister for the Southern Suburbs) accepted an invitation to attend and speak at the dinner. The Vice Chancellor of Flinders University, Prof Anne Edwards, hosted the dinner.

About 60 people attended the dinner and represented a mix of researchers, government policy-makers and practitioners. Each table seated a mix of people to facilitate interaction.

Prof Anne Edwards welcomed guests to the dinner and spoke of the encouragement Flinders University gives to multi-disciplinary research. Minister Hill addressed the dinner and spoke about the importance of the South Australian Strategic Plan as a framework for policies concerning the social determinants of health in South Australia. Prof Fran Baum described the AHIP program and spoke particularly about its desire to engage users of research on health inequities and about the desire of the AHIP to engage in debates about the different forms of evidence that can be used to research the determinants of population health status.

Wednesday morning (1st session) (AHIP team, invited guests, researchers and policy-makers)

Wednesday morning comprised a series of presentation by the guest speakers. The audience comprised AHIP team members and invited researchers and policy makers. Each presentation was followed by a discussion and questions from the audience. The session was chaired by Fran Baum.

Dr Jianghong Li and A/Prof Tony Blakely presented at the first part of the session.

Dr Jianghong Li. “How can research disparities in child health and wellbeing inform policy: some examples from WA.”

Jianghong Li gave an engaging presentation about the work of the Institute of Child Health Research in Western Australia (WA) on social disparities. Her presentation reinforced the payoffs of the well-established WA data linkage system, which is an enormous resource for researchers working on the social determinants of health. One particularly interesting finding was that the well known 'social gradient' in health was not evident with respect to Indigenous child health, which raises questions about whether there are differences in the social and economic pathways to child health in Indigenous and non-Indigenous population.

A/Prof. Tony Blakely. “What have policy meakers in New Zealand learnt from record linkage of census and mortality data? The NZ Census-Mortality study.”

Tony Blakely has been working for many years developing the New Zealand Census-Mortality study which now provides an enormous resource for the description and monitoring of social and economic inequalities in health. He provided engaging insights into just how his research has gained such authority with policy-makers in New Zealand. He also highlighted that while researchers have traditionally concentrated on social and economic disparities in cardiovascular disease that evidence from their work suggests that inequalities are now increasing in cancer mortality.

Both presentations made evident the strong need to develop research infrastructure through data linkage at a State and National level in order to progress work on social and economic inequalities in health. The WA model is world class in its linking of many databases across jurisdictions (eg education, health) and this facilitates the capacity to conduct high-quality policy-relevant research. Tony's presentation reinforced the need for a census-linked study in Australia to overcome many of the difficulties we have in reporting social and economic inequalities in health. Such a study would greatly advance our capacity to monitor Indigenous inequalities in health, for example. AHIP has committed to lobbying at a National level to advance this possibility.

A/Prof Anne Kavanagh and Ms Michele Herriot (Department of Health, South Australia) comprised a panel that discussed Li and Blakely's papers.

Wednesday morning (2nd session) (AHIP team, invited guests, researchers and policy-makers)

Prof Jennie Popay. “Community engagement in urban renewal – what, when and how?”

In the second part of the session, Jennie Popay delivered a paper on community engagement in urban renewal. Her presentation highlighted the repeat cycle of regeneration initiatives in many deprived urban areas in Britain and focussed on the inability of the public sector to engage in meaningful ways with disadvantaged people.

Professor Sue Richardson, Dr Adam Graycar (Department of Premier and Cabinet, South Australia) and Professor Andrew Beer comprised a panel that discussed Popay's paper.

Wednesday afternoon (AHIP team and invited guests)

Wednesday afternoon was set aside for AHIP team members and invited guests to meet and discuss core business. In this session Angela Lawless from the South Australian Community Health Research Unit spoke about the upcoming International Society for Equity (ISEqH) in Health Conference which will take place in Adelaide 11th-13th of September 2006. The overarching theme for the ISEqH's Fourth International Conference is Creating Healthy Societies through Inclusion and Equity and there will be two particular subthemes of Aboriginal health and Arts and Equity in Health. There was discussion about AHIP holding their National Conference in Adelaide the day after the ISEqH conference, in order to maximise the opportunity for national and international participation in the AHIP event. It was decided to hold a one day Conference after the ISEqH conference with the theme being the challenges and advantages of a multidisciplinary approach to researching health inequities. Also discussed in this session was the timing and format of the National Short Courses which would take place in 2007/2008. In the remainder of the session participants split into two groups to work on two upcoming NHMRC grant application expressions of interest.

Thursday morning (AHIP team and Jennie Popay)

The AHIP Team and Jennie Popay met to debrief on the retreat and address outstanding issues. The following topics were discussed over the morning:

Team Rules and Processes: The Team reviewed the document tabled by Robin Maslen entitled "Some Conditions for Team Effectiveness" and discussed each relevant point under the headings 'Context', 'What', 'Who', 'How', 'Relationships'.

TI work plans Oct 2005 to Oct 2006: Each Team Investigator outlined their research plans for the following year.

Strategic Plan against work plans: The Team reviewed the milestones named in the grant application for 2005 and identified priorities for meeting these milestones over the next year.

Retreat 2006: It was decided that the next retreat would be held in Melbourne in the week commencing 13th November 2006. We discussed how we might improve on the 2005 retreat. Suggestions included making child care facilities available.

Feedback on NHMRC EOI Social Networks grant proposal: Anne Kavanagh summarized a proposed project for which an expression of interest was being submitted to the NHMRC for funding. Jennie Popay and the team discussed the application and gave feedback.

Publishing: The Team discussed strategic directions for paper writing and issues around authorship, quality of publications and appropriate journals to target.

Feedback on 2005 retreat: It was agreed that much had been gained by holding the retreat including building stronger working relationships amongst team members.

At the conclusion of this meeting, the retreat ended for the Team Investigators. The Lead Investigators stayed on for a meeting of the Executive.