

From the book review editor

THIS EDITION of *Australian Health Review* brings together two useful and practical local texts, one dealing with the drivers that shape and determine the health and wellbeing of our Australian Indigenous population, and the other exploring the approaches and skills for working with communities around health and human services.

Book reviews

Social determinants of Indigenous health

Carson B, Dunbar T, Chenhall RD, Bailie R (eds)

Allen and Unwin, 2007

ISBN: 978 1 74175 142 0. 306 + xxix pages.

RRP: \$49.95

Social determinants of indigenous health is a useful and important addition to the available literature that explores health policy, health delivery and the impact of social factors on the health of Australians. Specifically, this text is devoted to informing the reader of the relationship between the political and social imperatives and Indigenous health.

The text is well set up by the authors in the first two chapters where they more than adequately define what is meant by social determinants and Indigenous health and take the reader through an understanding of the process using a range of social epidemiology and biological models. These opening chapters are well written and provide enough depth for those that want a greater understanding of ways Indigenous health is viewed and measured, while at the same time it does not overwhelm the casual reader.

Following the contextual and theoretical platform laid down in the opening chapters, the text then tackles the key social, historical, cultural, political and infrastructure issues contributing to Indigenous health outcomes, namely: history; racism; poverty and social class; social capital; education; employment and welfare; country;

housing; policy processes; human rights; and interventions and sustainable programs.

Each chapter coherently articulates the multiple and intertwined issues that confront the health and welfare of Indigenous Australians. The text is well set out and makes good use of discussion questions. Additionally, the authors have successfully used graphs, tables and case studies to explain and highlight concepts and health/welfare inequalities. Each chapter makes use of a dot-point summary of key issues and concepts. This approach works well and draws each chapter to a fitting end.

One of the real plusses of this offering is that the text successfully brings together the empirical evidence and research regarding Indigenous health as well as supporting this with key insights from the "field".

It is a very well written and researched text that objectively examines a key area of health policy and need in Australia. This text adds to our understanding of key social issues and determinants on the health outcomes of Indigenous Australians. *Social determinants of Indigenous health* would be suitable for health policy students, academics, those considering working in Indigenous health or those wanting to gain a greater understanding of Indigenous health and the relationship between health and a range of social and cultural factors.

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★☆

Working with communities in health and human services

Taylor J, Wilkinson D, Cheers B

Oxford University Press, 2007

ISBN: 978 0 19 555835 7. 291+ xix pages . RRP: \$65

ACCORDING TO the back cover, *Working with communities in health and human services* has been designed to “support a ‘reflective practice’ approach and to enable students to develop skills for working with communities with diverse needs.” The text is comprised of three key sections around theory and concepts used to understand communities; conceptual approaches to and practice frameworks for working with communities; and practical working skills.

The text is well set out and is easy to read. The authors have utilised appropriate case studies to support the chapter content and included useful practical tips and case studies, and the chapter summaries bring key issues together.

This book is somewhat of an “overview” text. It covers a lot of territory and the content is fairly superficial. For those that don’t understand key concepts of working with communities on health-specific projects or don’t come from this area of work, the text would leave you wanting more.

There were a few key areas that the text could have devoted more attention to. The text outlines

“community” from an Indigenous health perspective, however it would have been useful to spend a little more time discussing the health and human service needs of other vulnerable groups in the community such as migrant or other stigmatised or marginalised groups. Similarly, the text outlines the role of government in health and social care development, however a section on the “politics” of health would have been a useful addition for readers to ponder. Finally, the text could have included more in-depth description and a step-by-step approach on undertaking community needs analysis and developing a submission or action plan.

This text is squarely aimed at students and provides a basic overview of aspects of working with communities from a health and human services perspective. This is not a comprehensive book and readers may need to seek out additional literature to supplement the material covered in this book.

Reviewer rating: ★★☆☆

Dr Gary E Day

Book Review Editor
Australian Health Review