Improving health and reducing inequalities through the study of social influences on health and wellbeing

Working together
It’s essential to know what helps people to live their lives free from the burden of poor health. We are helped in our work by members of the public who volunteer to provide information about their health and other factors that can affect their lives. We are keen to work with other researchers, always open to discussing potential collaboration, and to offer the services of our in-house Population Health Research Facility, which comprises of a team of highly skilled project managers, field workers and research nurses.

We are also interested to hear from decision makers and practitioners who would like to work with us to develop and evaluate innovative programmes and policies that may have an impact on health and wellbeing.

To find out more about the work of the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, visit www.glasgow.ac.uk/sphsu

We welcome approaches from the public, voluntary, education and private sectors wishing to contribute to public health improvement and reducing health inequalities.

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on health and wellbeing
Health. Good health. It’s what we all hope for and wish for others. But not everyone enjoys good health. We work to understand how different factors – social, behavioural, economic, political, and environmental – affect the health and wellbeing of people and populations. We work to understand why these factors affect people differently. And we work to identify the best ways to improve health and reduce inequality.

A place of excellence
The MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, brings together the foundations of a university founded in 1451 and a research group whose roots began in 1955, with expertise in the very latest techniques in data analysis and an up-to-date understanding of the complexity of factors that affect human health.

Jointly funded by The Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Scottish Government Chief Scientist Office (CSO), as part of the Institute of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow, we take a world-changing outlook to the potential of our work. We have over one hundred research staff and students at any one time, who join us from across the world, and come from a range of disciplines: sociology, anthropology, epidemiology and psychology to public health medicine, human sciences, nutrition, and nursing, to mathematics, statistics and the natural sciences.

We support students and researchers beginning their careers and our track record of developing the careers of our staff means that many have gone on to become leaders in the field.

Improving health and wellbeing
Although good healthcare is important in the treatment and recovery of people suffering from illness, our focus is on the prevention of ill health across the whole population.

Improving health and wellbeing at a population level requires action on the social determinants of health and a focus on the reduction of health inequalities. In our work we seek to answer questions such as:

- Why does life expectancy depend so much on where you were born and where you live?
- How do we prevent the uptake of smoking by teenagers?
- How can schools best support the health and wellbeing of students?
- What role does the media play in promoting unhealthy behaviour?
- What is the impact of welfare reform on mental health?
- How do we support family members and peers to improve the health and wellbeing of their friends and relatives?
- What are the key measures that governments can take to reduce health inequalities?

In designing and testing ways to improve health and reduce inequality we work in partnership with politicians, policy makers, health professionals and others to ensure our work has relevance and impact on policy and practice.

Our research team
Our multidisciplinary research team works within and across six research programmes. We develop and apply the latest research methods to help us to understand what is happening, identify mechanisms that can bring about change, and develop and assess policies and programmes designed to improve health and reduce inequalities.

Four of our research programmes reflect the key areas which critically shape the health and wellbeing of populations and where efforts to improve health can be focussed. These are the relationships we have with friends, colleagues and family; the settings and organisations where we spend much of our time; the neighbourhoods and communities in which we live; and, at the broadest level, the local, national and international institutions that shape our lives through legislation and economic and social policy. Our two other research programmes focus on perspectives and methods that are integral to our work within and across the other programmes. These are the complexity of multiple and interdependent influences on health and of actions to improve health, and a commitment to measure, understand, and reduce inequalities. Our work aims to generate the evidence, insight, and knowledge that hold the key to improving population health.