**REIMAGINING INDIGENOUS HEALTH: Moving Beyond the Social Determinants of Health**

**Stephanie Carroll Rainie (Ahtna Ahtabascan)**

While the social determinants of health framework introduces important consideration of proximal and distal factors that affect individual health, the model needs to be reimagined to fit the Indigenous context. From many Indigenous epistemologies, health springs from different factors, for example, traditional practices and cultural continuity. Health is a property of a community, and less a property of individuals. Health is about relationships with ancestors, future generations, and is specific to time and place. Reimagining, rather than incremental adaptation, will be necessary to extend the WHO social determinants framework to the Indigenous context. This poster examines several assumptions within the World Health Organization analysis of health determinants that might not fit the Indigenous community epistemologies and argues for a re-imagining of what strengthens Indigenous health and well-being in Indigenous communities.

### The Social Determinants of Health

- **Genes and Biology**
- **Physical Environment**
- **Health Behaviors**
- **Social and Economic Factors**
- **Gender and Sexuality**
- **Globalization**
- **Structural Sectors**
- **Health Organizations**

**The Social Determinants of Health**

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### Indigenous Social Determinants of Health

- **In recent years researchers, health professionals, and others have begun to adopt the social determinants of health framework to Indigenous contexts. Much of this work has been done in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (7–18). Very little has been written in this area about the social determinants of health for Indigenous communities in the United States.**

- **Regardless of location, the assumption behind these observations has been that Indigenous contexts may include social determinants that are absent in mainstream contexts or that operate in distinctive ways. These Indigenous social determinants of health are largely distal factors such as biological, ecological, cultural, social, economic, and environmental determinants.**

### Assumptions in Social Determinants of Health Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions In the SDH Framework</th>
<th>Ways to Transcend</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western model that even when adapted to Indigenous circumstances continues to use Western ways of knowing</td>
<td>Improve Indigenous epistemologies to guide, or co-create with Western ideas, theories of health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice of the “other”</td>
<td>Indigenous voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Action oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
<td>Process oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on “causal gaps” between subpopulations and the general or dominant population</td>
<td>Align movement with the people’s own vision of a healthy, sustainable society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disease and disability</td>
<td>Asset based</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community and population health defined by aggregate measures of individual health</td>
<td>Community and individual health indicate their progress toward community’s goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonized in time and spiritual space</td>
<td>Incorporates history and spiritual space into health narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights of Indigenous peoples</td>
<td>Claims future health and ancestral; generations may include a role for each community member; connects with values, language, culture, kind, place, stewardship, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health outcomes primarily conceived as physical and emotional</td>
<td>Health outcomes include cultural and spiritual dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes only focused on human characteristics</td>
<td>Outcomes include non-human health, such as the environment, animals, language, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Reimagining Indigenous Health

- **The assumptions inherent in the social determinants of health framework that begins by asking what, for the peoples involved, constitutes a healthy community or society. In effect, the critique of the social determinants of health framework invites a redefinition of health itself.**

- **Are healthy communities merely aggregations of healthy individuals? Or is health something that at least in part begins at the community level?**

- **Do such factors as self-determination, community control over community life, cultural continuities, functional community organization, and competent governance, among others, foster improved health and well-being?**

- **What are the actions that Indigenous nations can take at the community level that support their own visions of healthy, sustainable communities?**

- **How might we move beyond the social determinants of health framework to a new reality that respects both Indigenous conceptions and to diverse Indigenous circumstances?**

- **How have some Indigenous nations addressed these concerns?**

- **What are the implications for Indigenous peoples and nations; federal and other governments; civil society and non-profits; and researchers?**

### Collaborating Authors

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