



## *Book Review*

*Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social* edited by Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay, and Charlotte Reading.

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## Book Review

*Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social* edited by Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay, and Charlotte Reading. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2015. 291 pp. \$54.95 paperback.

The editors of this collection (Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay, and Reading) worked with an accomplished group of scholars, many of whom are Indigenous, to look beyond the strictly physical health of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Health is influenced by a multitude of external factors. The *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social* examines some of the issues that influence and have an impact on the social and structural issues that Indigenous people face that contribute to their health and well-being. The book is divided into four parts—Part 1: Setting the Context; Part 2: Beyond the Social; Part 3: Wellness is Knowing Who We Are: Culture, Language and Identity; and Part 4: Revisioning Medicine: Toward Indigenization. These expose the reader to various aspects of health and well-being from an Indigenous perspective. The editors state that “the well-being of individuals and communities [is] linked to much broader dynamics than typically assumed by the individualistic, biomedical approaches to health that have long dominated non-Indigenous medicine” (p. xi), and as such, this collective work discusses the social and structural determinants that influence and have an impact on Indigenous health.

Storytelling is an Indigenous research method that is being used by many scholars to delve deeper into issues that are complex and interconnected. Kennedy argues that storytelling is the key to health and well-being, as it helps with identity, community connectedness, and self-esteem, but other authors further argue that storytelling can also help with family connectedness, identity, culture, language, and keeping traditional knowledge alive. The stories generated in these chapters coalesce and synergize to provide a holistic overview of Indigenous people's health from birth to adulthood in all aspects of self (mental, spiritual, physical and emotional), and from individual to collective. Part 1 provides definitions of the social determinants of health, as well as the structural determinants (social, political, and economic structures) that have had and continue to have an impact on Indigenous people's health. Reading examines these social, political, and historic factors, leading into the important endorsement of “two-eyed seeing” that Marshall, Marshall and Bartlett espouse in the next chapter. Two-eyed seeing explains how people should try to see health from more than one perspective (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) at the same time and treat each perspective as equally important, as it is important to stay cognizant of many different ways of knowing (and doing) things. Tagalik furthers this by stating that knowledge systems and holistic thinking can influence the future of health, especially if the stories of Elders and traditional knowledge are passed on in positive ways that will help build upon a solid foundation of traditional knowledge. Brant Castellano reminds us that health includes spirituality, and that culture and ceremony should be a part of contemporary Indigenous health and healing, and that health care professionals need to be culturally sensitive and

aware of the sociopolitical history that has led Indigenous people in Canada to this point. The theme of Part 1 is the four aspects of self (physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental) and how they need to be understood and represented when one is defining Indigenous health and healing.

Richmond begins Part 2 by explaining the effects of environmental dispossession on the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental being of Indigenous people and their health. Richmond explains that identity, culture, and language are tied to the land, and being dispossessed of traditional lands harms all aspects of a person. Greenwood and Jones argue that it is important to build a strong, positive identity in Indigenous children through early childhood learning and optimal experiences in order to build a solid foundation for improved health at the individual, family, and community levels. The chapter by Chandler and Dunlop discusses the importance of culture and language, as poor health is not just about the physical, but rather emerges from a collective and intergenerational wound that requires cultural medicine to heal. Hunt reminds the reader that gender is also a determinant of health, and that there have always been LGBTQ people in Indigenous communities, but with the gender binary introduced by settler culture, Indigenous LGBTQ people have been further marginalized. Settler culture also marginalizes the physical environment through overuse. The physical environment and the organic or biological world act upon Indigenous people as much as they act upon the physical environment, and de Leeuw argues that space and place are very much a part of Indigenous health. Teegee and Lindsay build upon Richmond's chapter and further the discussion that de Leeuw begins by asserting the importance of healing the environment and being stewards of land as a means of improving the health of Indigenous peoples. Following the theme of storytelling, Kennedy explains that storytelling builds identity, community connectedness, and self-esteem; traditional methods of knowledge translation are thus important to Indigenous health. In Part 2, there is a theme of looking beyond the individual to the collective; to improve Indigenous health, it is necessary not just to look at an individual, but also to consider the families and the communities from which they draw their support, as this will influence their worldview, which will in turn influence their self-care.

Many of the issues presented in the first two parts are echoed in Part 3, which starts with Dion Stout explaining that many things are changing and that Indigenous people must embrace these changes and work toward improving their health. Steinhauer and Lamouche state that is important for health professionals to be trained about Indigenous cultures and languages and that "ceremonial, experiential and land-based learning" are necessary parts of the contemporary classroom to ensure cultural sensitivity and continuity in practice. For Indigenous health professionals to "walk in both worlds," they must have a strong foundation in their culture, languages, and traditional knowledge, because health is a political issue. Adam builds upon this idea by stating that the federal government is interested in outcomes, not the colonial illnesses that First Nations face. One way to begin healing from colonial illnesses, Adam contends, is to provide adequate and high-quality early childhood development and learning programs, which Isaac and Jamieson argue are underfunded and not widely enough available to Indigenous children to change life trajectories and improve health. However, in order to have adequate culturally sensitive programs and

services, Macdougall argues that Indigenous people must have a firm grounding in their own identities and family connections, which will lead to strong associations with culture and language, which will in turn assist with good health. Community, culture and language are all themes in Part 3 of the book, and each chapter in this section acknowledges that there is much work to be done here in order to balance Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews for the improved health of Indigenous peoples.

Knowing the social and structural determinants surrounding Indigenous people's health is the first step toward improving it. Makokis and Makokis highlight the need to train healthcare professionals about Indigenous peoples in order to provide culturally sensitive and responsive healthcare services. Caron, who is an Indigenous physician, explains that Indigenous people who wish to enter healthcare professions need to be prepared for the delicate balance of walking in two worlds (Indigenous and Western) that will inevitably be demanded of all Indigenous people who undertake work in healthcare. In order to maintain balance, sometimes Indigenous healthcare professionals must challenge biomedical knowledge, which is what Polanco and Arbour argue regarding the thrifty gene associated with Indigenous people and responsible for type 2 diabetes. Polanco and Arbour illustrate that many factors affect Indigenous people with type 2 diabetes, and that working from racially placed theories like the "thrifty gene" theory does not help with intergenerational healing, and can divert resources from examining other factors that affect an Indigenous person who is diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Similarly, Payak, Amirault, and Masching argue that connecting Indigenous communities with Indigenous patients with HIV/AIDS assists with self-care. The theme in Part 4 is that of the importance of health care professionals who are Indigenous or understand Indigenous cultures and languages (and the diversity of these cultures and languages) in order to provide adequate and positive health care for Indigenous peoples, which will lead to improved health outcomes.

This important collection provides insight and knowledge that is a needed addition to the literature on Indigenous people's health. Future policy should take into consideration the issues raised by the chapter authors as they represent an Indigenous worldview—one that is holistic, collectivist, changing, and steeped in culture and language. For example, early childhood education has been found to be important for positive outcomes in adulthood; therefore, increasing the numbers of Indigenous children receiving early childhood learning experiences could provide a positive sense of self, and improve school achievements, which can lead to improved health and well-being. Woven throughout the stories and knowledge are the themes of self-determination and self-governance. Self-determination and self-governance cannot be achieved without grounding in traditional knowledge and ways of being, which links culture, language, and worldview to health and well-being. The *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada* brings together a diverse collection of knowledge using traditional ways of passing on knowledge (storytelling) that can be used in policy development, funding, and healthcare planning. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in Indigenous peoples' health in Canada.

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