

Topic 2: Political, economic and commercial determinants of health

In this topic we will be focusing on the role of policy and politics, the economy and commercial interests as broad societal factors that determine health. These sit within the outermost layer of Dahlgren and Whitehead's (1991) determinants of health model (see Week 4, Topic 1).

Policy and politics of health

Policy is rather like the elephant – you recognise it when you see it but cannot easily define it.

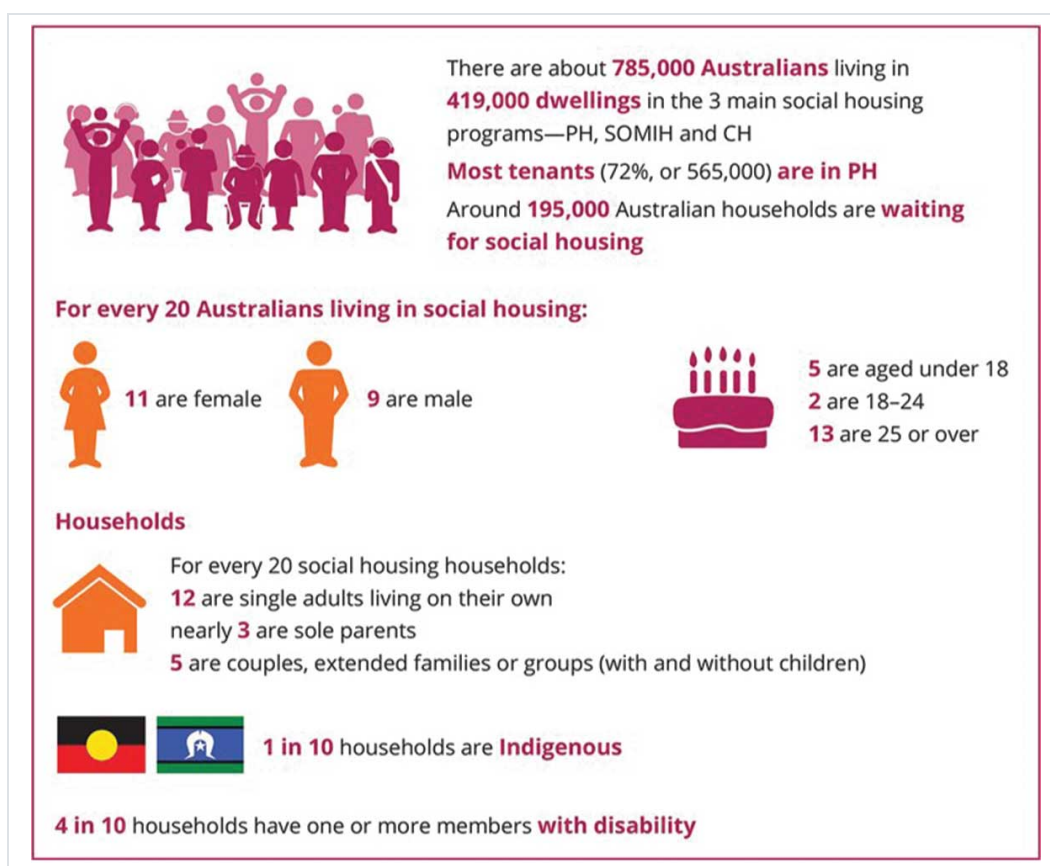
(Cunningham 1963, p. 229)

It is not the role of this subject to provide you with a deep dive into the various political ideologies or policy making and analysis processes – there are other subjects, and indeed entire courses, that build these skills. For the purposes of this subject, we will introduce you to the key concepts in policy for health and the role of politics as public health practice is fundamentally politically driven.

Healthy public policy and health in all policies

Healthy public policy is central to public health – it is often referred to as health in all policies. Public policy can alter, enhance or degrade the physical and socioeconomic environments in which we live. For instance, public housing policy in Australia has a direct impact on the living conditions for around 785 000 people (AIHW 2018), and as we know, when examining the determinants of health, the living and working environment play a crucial role in how health is experienced by individuals, communities and populations. These living conditions can also contribute to further entrenching health inequalities and inequities (AIHW 2016). Healthy public policy and health in all policies is about considering the health impact of all public policy decisions, so that we can make better public policy decisions that alter the conditions we live in to be more health enhancing. This is particularly important as many of the factors that affect health and wellbeing lay outside the reach of the health services sector and direct health policies. Consider the following infographic on Australian's in public housing from the AIHW (2018). You may wish to reflect on the policies that you are currently aware of that may impact on those living in public housing, and the other disadvantages experienced by this population. Now consider the role of health in all policies for this population of disadvantaged Australians. How do you think housing policy might impact on health for those living in public housing?

National housing survey results 2018



(Click to expand the image)

Source: [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, National social housing survey 2018, AIHW, viewed 21 January 2021](#)

The future of health in all policies, by Ketan Shankaradass [14:18 mins]

Watch this presentation from Ketan Shankardass. He discusses the application of the health in all policies approach in Canada to tackle health inequalities and inequities.

The future of Health in All Policies | Ketan Shankaradass



Recommended reading

Politics, political ideology and systems of government have a profound impact on which policies are developed, adopted and implemented. Read this article by Kickbusch (2015) on politics as a determinant of health.

- Kickbusch, I 2015, 'The political determinants of health – 10 years on', [British Medical Journal \(Online\)](#), vol, 350, h81.

If you want to learn about how macro-policy environment influences health and wellbeing you can read the following two resources.

Read Part B: Policy options and experiences, Layer one: The macro-policy environment, of Dahlgren and Whitehead's report (2007 pp. 36–56).

- Dahlgren G & Whitehead M 2007, [European strategies for tackling social inequalities in health: Levelling up part 2](#), World Health Organization.

In this short editorial, McKee discusses the impact of the political determinants of health and how they contributed to the Grenfell tower fire in London in 2017 that left 79 people dead or missing.

- McKee, M 2017, 'Grenfell tower fire: Why we cannot ignore the political determinants of health', [British Medical Journal \(Online\)](#), vol. 357, j2966.



Recommended reflection



Spend some time thinking about a controversial issue that has recently been in the media (for example, climate change, precarious employment – workplace industrial relations). Can you identify the politics behind the controversy? How is public policy being formulated to address the issue? What are the political influences on the way the issue is defined and subsequently addressed?

Document your reflection on the following padlet.

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2023 PHE5PUH T2 Week 4, Topic 2: The politics behind the controversy

Spend some time thinking about a controversial issue that has recently been in the media (for example, climate change, precarious employment – workplace industrial relations). Can you identify the politics behind the controversy? How is public policy being formulated to address the issue? What are the political influences on the way the issue is defined and subsequently addressed?



Teaching Strikes in

2022



Eliza Bell-White 7d
Teaching Strikes in 2022

Mid-last year, tens of
thousands of teachers in
NSW took industrial action
in opposition of inadequate

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Economic determinants of health

Broadly speaking, the term economics refers to the choices made in relation to the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services in the context of scarcity (limited availability of goods and services) (Martin & Brain 2019). In Week 3 we discussed the social gradient of health in relation to an individual's income (micro-economics) as driven by the wider determinants of health, such as education and employment. In this topic, we will look at the role of macro-economics in relation to health. Macro-economics refers to large-scale economic conditions, such as the strength of national and global economies and productivity, interest rates, national unemployment, and inflation (Dunn 2004).



Recommended reading

Read this article from Naik et al. (2019) on the macro-economics and the evidence for the health and health inequalities, and the impact of population-level macro-economic factors, strategies, policies and interventions.

- Naik, Y, Baker, P, Ismail, SA, Tillmann, T, Bash, K, Quantz, D, Hillier-Brown, F, Jayatunga, W, Kelly, G, Black, M, Gopfert, A, Roderick, P, Barr, B & Bambra, C 2019, 'Going upstream – an umbrella review of the macroeconomic determinants of health and health inequalities', [BMC Public Health](#), vol. 19, no. 1678.





Recommended reflection

'Economic growth alone does not guarantee better health for all. While the economic advances of the past few decades have benefited some segments of societies, the needs of many have gone unmet. Amongst the poorest of the poor in many countries, ill health has increased even while national economy growth has increased.'

(Source: World Federation of Public Health Associations (1996). Resolutions Health, Economic and Development: A People Centered Approach. Washington DC, 1996.)

Reflect on this quote above from World Federation of Public Health Associations and describe in your own words what macro-economic growth means for health inequalities.

Document your reflection on the following padlet.

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2023 PHE5PUH T2 Week 4, Topic 2: Economic growth and better health

Reflect on what macro-economic growth means for health inequalities.



Macro-economic growth's affect on health inequalities

Eliza Bell-White 7d
Macro-economic growth's affect on health inequalities

Macro-economic growth is a crucial factor for the health outcomes for the majority. However, the positive affect of austerity can generally been seen most clearly in the more privileged majority of society.

It is crucial that those in power leverage public policy to distribute the resources

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The commercial determinants of health

Gaining increasing attention in the literature and among public health practitioners is the role of the commercial determinants of health, particularly in relation to driving the increasing burden of disease for non-communicable diseases. Commercial determinants of health are defined as 'factors that influence health which stem from the profit motive' (West et al. 2013). Essentially the commercial determinants of health include the impact of health and wellbeing that is experienced as a result of corporate or profit-driven undertakings. Corporate activities are embedded in all facets of our lives and environments. For instance, the availability, promotion and pricing of unhealthy consumable items, such as food, alcohol and tobacco, impacts on our choices. However, these corporate activities are also influenced by drivers such as political ideology and values, and macro-economic factors — but there is much that can be achieved through the use of public health advocacy; for example, consider the changes we have experienced in Australia in relation to tobacco advertising and sport.



Recommended reading

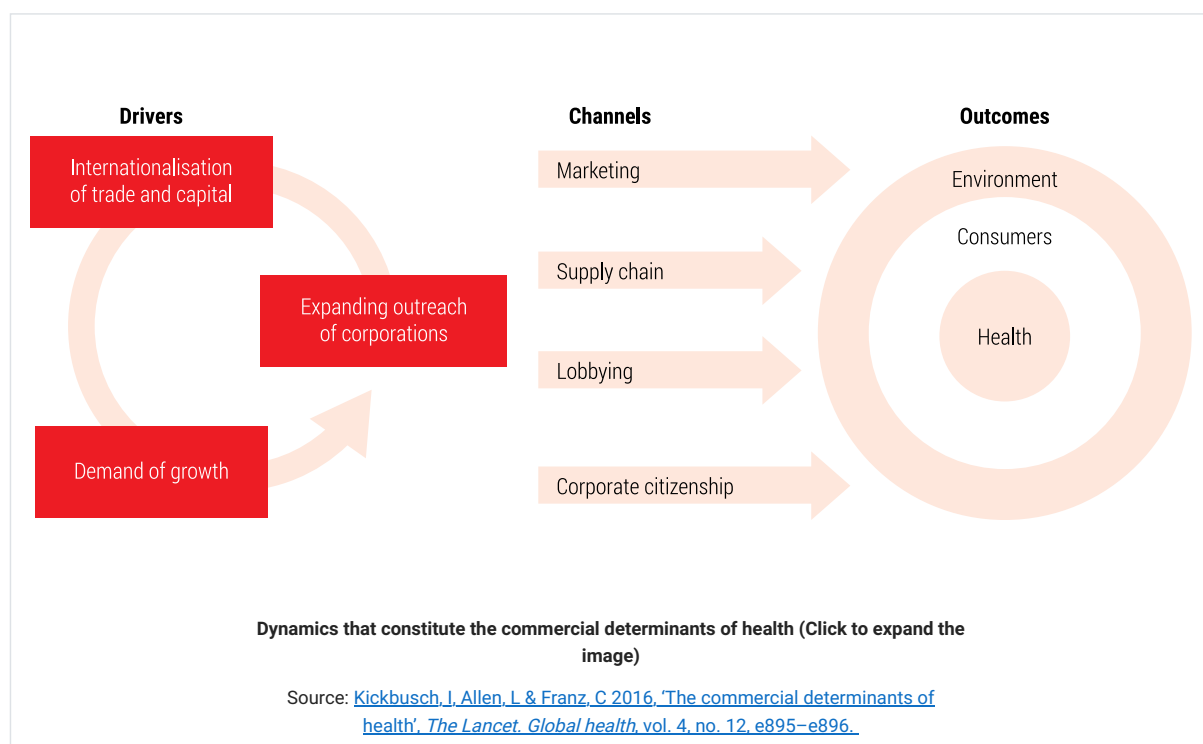


We can learn more about the intersection between political, economic and corporate interests by taking a look at the recent decision made by the Northern Territory Government to approve plans for the opening of a large Dan Murphy's outlet in Darwin – an Australian city where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately experiencing the harms of alcohol and alcohol addiction. This example also demonstrates public health advocacy, and how communities can fight back against commercial interests.

- Ward A 2020, [Woolworths: a case study of the commercial determinants of health – and how communities can fight back](#), Croakey.org.

Kickbusch et al. (2016) suggest that under the banner of the commercial determinants of health we see 'a synergistic, multidisciplinary field that addresses the drivers and channels through which corporations propagate the non-communicable diseases pandemic'. Corporate activities shape our social and physical environments through a range of channels (see figure below). Kickbusch et al. (2016) provide a summary of the dynamics that constitute the commercial determinants of health. Take note of the role of economics and policy in this figure.

The commercial determinants of health



An organisation's response to COVID-19 [6:13 mins]

Watch the below video in which Victoria Wheeler interviews David Caple on the political, economic and commercial considerations on safety at work.

Enrolment options

2023-PHE5PUH-T2-W - Principles of Public Health

Lecturer: [Daniel Attard](#)
 Lecturer: [Craig Bellamy](#)
 Lecturer: [Lauren Burch](#)
 Lecturer: [Susan Chong](#)
 Lecturer: [Bethan Crosswell](#)
 Lecturer: [Kath Dalton](#)
 Lecturer: [Chris Ennis](#)
 Lecturer: [Chad Gasaway](#)
 Lecturer: [Cam George](#)
 Lecturer: [Deborah Gleeson](#)



[\[Transcript\]](#)



Required reading

In this article, de Lacy-Vawdon & Livingstone (2020) explore the varied conceptualisations of the commercial determinants of health, and the evidence to support the role of corporate, commercial and for-profit endeavours in contributing to the global burden of disease for non-communicable diseases. After reading this article spend some time thinking about the combination of political, economic and commercial determinants of health on a global scale for those most vulnerable.

- de Lacy-Vawdon, C, Livingstone, C 2020, 'Defining the commercial determinants of health: a systematic review', [BMC Public Health](#), vol. 20, no.1022.

Recommended reading

- Ireland, R, Bunn, C, Reith, G, Philpott, M, Capewell, S, Boyland, E & Chambers, S 2019, 'Commercial determinants of health: advertising of alcohol and unhealthy foods during sporting events', [Bulletin of the World Health Organisation](#), vol. 97, pp. 290–295.
- Kickbusch, I, Allen, L, Franz, C 2016, 'The commercial determinants of health', [Lancet Global Health](#), vol. 4, no. 12.



Discussion: Observing your social, physical and virtual environments

Take some time this week to consider and observe your social, physical and virtual environments. This could include places you regularly visit like your local recreation centre, a virtual online social group, your local library or a café.

Your task

1. In reflecting on these environments, think about the policies that may be influencing the shape and features of this environment, the economic drivers that have influenced the cost or availability of the environment or service, and the commercial and corporate presence that might exist. Note these down, and then consider how these factors are intersecting to shape your behaviours and your health.
2. Share this on the below padlet.
3. Read and comment on the posts made by your fellow students.



Below is an example from a recent visit to my local leisure and recreation centre.

Policy and politics: my local government owns and contracts out the operation of this facility – this is the result of local council political decisions and policies. These political and policy decisions mean that I have a safe, reliable, clean and affordable recreation facility close to my home where I can be physically active.

Economics: The local economy is a priority for my local government, and they believe that this facility provides local jobs for young people, such as lifeguard positions, swimming instructors, gym instructors and customer service officers. These people may otherwise struggle to find local employment. Unemployment is a key macro-economic driver of health and is a social determinant of health. However, the facility is operated by a private for-profit corporation, and this may result in precarious employment for these young people, including underpayment and insecure work.

Commercial: A private entity operates this facility, and while they might be bound by their service agreement with our local government to keep the cost of accessing the facility low, they may not be bound to provide healthy affordable food options within the facility. I can observe a large soft drink fridge that is stocked with sugary drinks. I can also see posters marketing hot dog and soft drink meal deals as a school holiday special – there is a line of children wrapped in towels waiting to purchase drinks and/or hot dogs after finishing their swimming lessons.

These three societal-level determinants of health are creating my experience of the leisure centre environment and impacting on the choices made by those that use the facility. We can see from this example the intersection of these determinants.

Guidelines

- This activity is not graded but is an essential part of your learning. Your submission will be reviewed by your tutor, though you may not receive specific feedback.
- Spend about 40 minutes on this activity.
- Complete this activity by Thursday 12:00 noon.

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2023 PHE5PUH T2 Week 4, Topic 2: Observing your social, physical and virtual environments

Take some time this week to consider and observe your social, physical and virtual environments. This could include places you regularly visit like your local recreation centre, a virtual online social group, your local library or a café.



Political, economic and commercial reflection - my morning coffee

MADISON HOUGH 4d
Political, economic and commercial reflection - my morning coffee

I was grabbing a coffee at a local coffee shop yesterday, so I thought I would discuss this.

Political: the coffee shop has changed hands many times in this post-COVID world

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