



Beyond the Social: Author Interviews

All of the contributors interviewed in this video series, from the highly-acclaimed book [Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social](#), share a common concern with improving the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. In sharing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit traditional knowledge alongside Western academic and medical knowledge, the authors demonstrate the potential gains of walking in two worlds, integrating the best of both Indigenous and Western knowledge, and honouring and respecting the diverse healing and medical practices available to us today.

Video - Chapter 1: Structural determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' health, with Charlotte Loppie



Charlotte Loppie's explanation of the structural elements of health disparities helps provide a framework for understanding why health inequities persist despite decades of well-intentioned policies and programs that have aimed to address the chronic illnesses and health issues faced by many Indigenous communities. She uses

the metaphor of a tree to explain how three separate, but interdependent components of society work together to shape and structure the context of health outcomes.

Transcript

My name is Charlotte Loppie and I am a Professor in the School of Public Health and Social Policy at the University of Victoria, and I am the director for the Centre for Aboriginal Health Research¹ there.

Within an Indigenous worldview, the metaphor of the tree often helps people understand those social determinants that lots of people are talking about

¹ Name has changed to Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement.

now. So, within that metaphor we can see that the tree is, first of all, part of the natural environment and so it has systems within it that sustains its life. So, if we look at those three components of the tree – the crown, the core (or the trunk), and the roots - we see that these systems are all interdependent and interconnected with one another. The root system – the root component of the tree – creates structure for the tree in the same way root determinants or structural determinants create a foundation for the systems and the environments we see in our world that influence our health. Those structures are things like political, social, historical, and economic systems. And so the decisions that are made, the ideologies that are created and perpetuated within that root system then influence the systems or the core of that tree.

So the core of that tree are the systems – I call them the moving parts in the chapter, which are things like the relationship that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have. Those could be political relationships, social relationships. Those are the systems of care and support that we see in our environments, whether it be legal, health care, education, social justice, things like that, and also the discourses that occur within those systems about how Indigenous people are characterized. All of those things work together to create the environments in which people actually live, and so the physical environment, whether or not they live in conditions of poverty or affluence, whether they are in physical locations that are easily accessible to care and education, employment, economic development, and things like that. Those systems are usually what we focus on but in this tree analogy, if we visualize the social determinants in this way, we are better able to see how all of those things, from the proximal, intermediate, and distal – or the crown, core and root systems – work together and how those root systems are really important in terms of creating a foundation for everything else.

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