

Interdisciplinary Research and Innovative Thinking

Over more than 10 years SDHI has brought academics, students, practitioners, policymakers and communities together to develop research and grow capacity

Background

The Social Dimensions of Health Institute (SDHI) is research platform which encompasses a variety of interdisciplinary health-related research being conducted through the universities of Dundee and St Andrews. In its first 10 years SDHI has developed into a unique venture in both its critical mass and the span of its capabilities, tackling widespread social, organisational, and public health-related issues. The programme of applied research examines the social, cultural and economic factors related to health, wellbeing and participation and contributes to policy and practices across Scotland, the UK and internationally.

Vision

The Vision of SDHI is to make a difference in people's lives, whether it is the life of a student, a post-doc researcher, a health or social care practitioner or a citizen of the world. Our research is applied, is shaped by and with our communities. SDHI is a learning and development platform, a vehicle to mobilise knowledge locally and globally. We have an open door policy and are a sanctuary as well as a creative incubator for new ideas and strategies to tackle the health and social challenges of the 21st Century. Our work addresses topics with high societal and policy relevance, including ageing and health, disability, violence, homelessness, environmental health impact health and social

“There is no doubt SDHI epitomises our approach to interdisciplinary working and is an exemplar of successful inter-institutional collaboration”

Professor Pete Downes, Principal and Vice Chancellor
University of Dundee.

What was achieved:

- High quality impact research with an applied focus
- Recognised interdisciplinary research institute
- Building of research capacity and capability
- Local and international collaborations
- Two universities, one vision

“SDHI was conceived as an innovative experiment, involving genuine collaboration between researchers in two institutions, and being born out of a truly bottom-up desire among scientists from different disciplines to work together.

The enthusiasm to collaborate was impressive and both institutions have benefited from the experience. I learnt a lot from passionate colleagues who have a real desire to improve peoples lives.”

Prof Paul Boyle, Founding Director of SDHI and former Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Connecting to transform lives

“SDHI is a professional hub-- a common place where researchers from the many spokes of interconnecting expertise can meet, discuss, rub shoulders, share ideas, conceptualise, grow, expand, and explore potential horizons. One of my favourite spaces in the SDHI Office is, what I call, the “wow wall.” On it are dozens and dozens of title pages from journal articles written by SDHI members and affiliates. It is a snapshot of the wide array of expertise embodied in this talented group of researchers—quality in health care, original work with people with disabilities, on cancer care, stroke rehabilitation, on domestic abuse, public health, and patient safety to name just a few.”

Tricia Tooman, PhD Student, St Andrews

Strategy

Our current strategy focuses on community engagement, internationalisation, and inter-network collaboration. SDHI continues to develop its activities around three pillars:

1. High Quality Research
2. Capacity and capability building for communities, academics and students
3. Knowledge mobilisation across academic and geographical boundaries

While the Institute works across disciplines as diverse as architecture, anthropology, medicine, geography, psychology, town planning, public health, nursing and social work, we work primarily from a social science perspective. We embrace a participatory work ethos and develop research in partnership with the NHS, local government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses.

SDHI is a platform for learning about the context and the interventions that make a difference in people’s lives. We are concerned to tackle the inequalities and inequities that exist in the inclusion and participation of ALL people in research, practice and social development.

In the spirit of collaboration, we aim to ‘break down’ disciplinary silos and serve as a platform for creative thinking, methodological innovation, high quality research and development. While SDHI is primarily a research institute, it embraces a human rights-based approach alongside its focus on developing the evidence base for interventions and practices.

Some of the questions that underpin our work are

- how the built, natural and social environment affects people’s health, wellbeing and participation
- how art engagement can improve people’s wellbeing after a stroke
- how research processes and methods need to become more inclusive of those who are frequently left out
- how care can be improved through a better understanding of patient experience



Impact

Between 2003 and 2013, SDHI has captured over £3.3M of funding from research and other funding bodies.

SDHI researchers have contributed to national and international policy and practice development. Most recently, we have for example contributed to United Nations recommendations on disability data collection, which will be build into international development goals.

Our Webinars, Seminars and Conferences have attracted academics and practitioners from around the world. Speakers have come from the United States, Australia, Brazil and Europe to name a few.

Our website has been visited by individuals and organisations from 144 countries.

SDHI researchers are publishing their work widely and speak regular at national and international conferences.

PhD students have become skilled and highly sought after academic researchers. Health practitioners have become critical clinical academics.

Communities and citizens have gained a voice and have helped shape our research and development.

An eBook of the past 10 years is forthcoming. More information can be found on our website at

Connecting to transform lives



www.sdhi.ac.uk

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