

Transforming European Health
Policy and Practice:
The WHO Collaborating Centre
on Culture and Health at Exeter

Background

Public health policies often rely on mortality- and morbidity-based conceptualisations of health and well-being. The World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Culture and Health (WHO Centre) at the University of Exeter has transformed public health policy and practice by introducing and embedding recognition of the historical and cultural determinants of health into the initiation, development, and delivery of WHO Europe's flagship Cultural Contexts of Health (CCH) programme.

Established in 2016, the WHO Collaborating Centre at Exeter has strengthened CCH capacity providing evidence from the medical humanities and social sciences to facilitate robust policymaking at European regional level.



Key findings

Scholars from the Centre have generated insights into the history of health and well-being, providing new frameworks for understanding culture as a core determinant of health. Specifically, their research has:

- Revealed how patterns of allergic disease relate to evolving forms of domestic, work, and outdoor environments, as well as changing patterns of food consumption and hygiene
- Explained how cultural change and adverse socio-economic circumstances can disrupt family stability and threaten emotional well-being across the life course
- Considered marginalised voices and experiences that often challenge dominant cultures of biomedical knowledge and practice
- Extended understandings of the ways that political, economic, and moral cultures impact on the use of mental health treatments within low-income communities



Policy outcomes

- Inclusion of innovative Humanities and Social Science methodologies and qualitative forms of evidence in health and well-being reporting in the [WHO's Health 2020](#) programme and the 2018 European Health Report.
- Review of approaches in the field of anti-bacterial resistance (ABR) control, to acknowledge the historical, cultural, and economic contexts of ABR responses.
- Adoption of the CCH [policy brief](#) *Culture Matters: Using a Cultural Contexts of Health Approach to Enhance Policy-making* as a WHO cornerstone product, and its recommendation for postgraduate level public health policy courses.
- Enhanced awareness of officials, international practitioners and policymakers of Intercultural Competence and Diversity Sensitivity, through the Centre's [Toolkit](#) production and delivery.
- Informing policy and reforms in mental health practice in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), through workshops and capacity-building introducing and applying CCH approaches.
- The introduction of the cultural contexts of health within WHO Europe's work has supported a paradigm shift in the approach to public health, reflected in the WHO and Health 2020 definition of health as not merely the absence of disease and infirmity, but of physical, social and mental well-being.



Team

Prof Mark Jackson and Dr Felicity Thomas

Research

ESRC; Wellcome and Leverhulme Trusts.

Government Areas of Research Interest

DHSC: Anti-Microbial Resistance; Lifestyle diseases, diabetes and obesity; Mental health, dementia; Migration and health.





20211B009

Get in touch

Send us an email at PolicyEngagement@exeter.ac.uk at any stage of the process for assistance.



Policy at Exeter