

# Research finds economic sector disinterested in reports about social and health inequalities

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A report just published by the World Health Organisation from a public health researcher at the University of Otago, Wellington shows that while New Zealand has developed innovative annual Social Reports, these have had varied uptake in addressing health inequities over the last decade.

The report headed by Frank Pega examines how well [government agencies](#) and civil society have utilised and applied information on social indicators and inequalities gathered by the Ministry of Social Development's annual Social Reports.

The study found that although the Ministries of [Health](#) and Social Development made good use of the Reports into social wellbeing to improve the social determinants of health and reduce health inequities, other government departments often did not.

This was particularly so with Treasury and agencies concerned with national policies relating to economic development.

“Our investigation found this limited the overall impact of the Social Reports in reducing those factors which drive health inequities between Māori and non-Māori, and different socio-economic groups in New Zealand,” says Mr Pega. “To some extent the impact of the Social Reports suffered because of this.”

The report points out that outside the government sector the Reports did

have considerable impact, especially amongst health advocates, service providers, Māori organisations, academics and the media. However it appears that there was little impact on the business sector.

“Economic theory and empirical evidence suggest that health inequalities can constrain economic development, so it is surprising that budgetary and economic development departments, and the commercial sector, didn’t make better use of the Social Reports for strategic planning, policy development and decision-making,” Mr Pega says.

“Many key-informants we interviewed expected the economic sector to consider and be guided by the findings of the Social Reports.”

The idea behind social reporting is that all relevant sectors need to be involved to effectively address complex issues. Tackling New Zealand’s wide ethnic inequalities in obesity, for example, requires changes from the commercial food sector, and public ‘education’ through the health sector.

”A multiplicity of social factors influence the health of New Zealanders, and this underlines the importance of acting on an annual report card of social indicators which determine our health status,” he says.

Provided by University of Otago

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