

# Towards a Sociology of Health and Healthcare

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**W**E ARE PLEASED TO INTRODUCE THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *HEALTHCARE POLICY / Politiques de Santé* based on papers presented at a recent biennial conference of the bilingual Canadian Society for the Sociology of Health / Société Canadienne de Sociologie de la Santé.

## About the Canadian Society for the Sociology of Health

The Canadian Society for the Sociology of Health (CSSH) is a recently established professional association dedicated to the promotion of the sociological study of health, illness and healthcare issues in Canada in both official languages. The CSSH grew out of the hosting of the 2008 Interim Conference of the Research Committee on Medical Sociology of the International Sociology Association in Montreal. The conference served as an important crystallizing event for Canadian sociology of health scholars. The CSSH subsequently hosted its second biennial, bilingual conference in Ottawa October 28–30, 2010. The primary objectives of our second conference were to:

- bring together anglophone and francophone health sociologists to present cutting-edge research on a variety of critical topics;
- advance the discipline and our understanding of health and healthcare issues; and
- foster greater translation of the knowledge we create to key users to better address critical health issues in Canada and abroad.

The conference enhanced dialogue between sociology of health scholars, showcased the work of both established and emerging Canadian sociology to a national and international audience, fostered linkages with key users of this research, and helped to build capacity in a new generation of health sociologists.

Sociology of health has emerged as one of the key yet relatively unrecognized subfields of health research that spans the population health, health services and policy research fields. It has been an important contributing field to key policy decision-makers, pioneers of medicare and the growing field of health knowledge translation. Sociology of health researchers have

always been well positioned to critically examine the key health and healthcare issues that have topped public opinion polls because of the discipline's ability to appreciate the importance of broader contextual factors and to problematize positions that are often taken for granted. This approach has become even more salient in the context of continued health system reform and a growing awareness of the importance of the broader social determinants of health to achieving health equity for all Canadians. Our country's sociology of health scholars have also been among the international leaders in this field (sometimes without this being known to national audiences, especially across the anglophone/francophone divide).

One of the key linkages we intend to foster with this organization is between health sociology scholars working within the context of English and French Canada. Too long have these communities worked in isolation, when so many more advances could be made by knowing about one another's research and collaborating in joint research and writing endeavours. To date there has been relatively little dialogue between scholars undertaking important work in English and those who work in French across Canada. Although francophone and anglophone health sociology reflect problematics in their respective regions and communities, there is much overlap and synergies that remain untapped. This situation is particularly unfortunate when we find out about the important work being done in either setting from our international colleagues rather than directly, through our own national networks. Without a bilingual venue such as the one we offer, we will continue to work in our two solitudes rather than coordinate efforts to advance important Canadian contributions to the field of sociology of health and healthcare.

### About This Special Issue

Following the CSSH's second biennial conference, the editors issued a call for a selection of the papers presented there to be peer reviewed and considered for publication as an edited collection. We received over 20 submissions, and 12 were approved for publication. The papers have been organized into four thematic sections: Population Health and Equity, Social Aspects of the Delivery of Care, Gender and the Social Experience of Health and Illness, and Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Healthcare in Canada.

We are particularly pleased to be partnering with *Healthcare Policy / Politiques de Santé* as the venue for our first Special Issue, largely because of its commitment to (a) publishing the work of sociology of health scholars, (b) bilingual publication – an issue we felt critical for our bilingual society and (c) open-access publication. We hope that the success of this Special Issue may spark interest in others to follow.