



The Australian Society for Medical Research

ASMR Medical Research Week® June 1 - 9 2017

MEDIA RELEASE, June 6, 2017

Professor Richard Wilkinson, ASMR Medalist 2017 - Scientist, Author, Advocate

Building a country where wellbeing is normal – you don't have to be rich, just more equal!

ASMR Medalist, Richard Wilkinson is Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham, co-founder of The Equality Trust and co-author of the international bestseller "The Spirit Level".

He is to be presented with the ASMR Medal today before addressing the National Press Club.

Professor Wilkinson's research shows us that rich countries don't necessarily have greater population wellbeing. It's really all about the gradients within countries, the differences between us. *Very wide income gaps mean less equality and the data shows this to be damaging across the whole population, from richest to poorest.*

Individuals and groups don't do well when their circumstances allow them to be judged as being 'low status' because of material differences. The more unequal the country, the worse the health and social problems.

The benefit of a healthier population is primarily to the people themselves. But greater income equality is a crucial determinant not only of health but of many aspects of the quality of life - including community life, trust, violence, child wellbeing, mental health etc.

It is now also clear that countries that are more equal perform better economically, and that greater equality is critical to achieving environmental sustainability and higher levels of wellbeing.

In Australia, the top 20 per cent of households receive half of our total income, while the bottom 20 per cent receives only four per cent. Australia does not rank well as an equal country. The evidence shows that general social dysfunction, shorter life expectancy, obesity, addictions and poor health across the board, is related to income inequality.

Professor Wilkinson believes health policy must be much more than a platform for providing access to medical care. Health policy must understand and have regard to, the social determinants involved if it is to be an effective tool, impacting in a positive way on population wellbeing and allowing the delivery of best possible, evidence based healthcare to all.

Richard Wilkinson along with and Kate Pickett authored "The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better" which encouraged 75 British MP's to sign the Equality Trust's 'Equality Pledge' prior to the UK's 2010 general election. Signatories promised to "actively support the case for policies designed to narrow the gap between rich and poor".

The Spirit level also won the 2011 UK Political Studies Association Publication of the Year Award and inspired a documentary film, "The Divide" released in 2016.

WHO: ASMR Medalist 2017, Professor Richard Wilkinson
WHAT: National Press Club Address and Medal presentation
WHERE: 16 National Circuit, Barton, Canberra
WHEN: Tuesday June 6, 2017 – 5pm to 7pm

Media contacts: **Dr Matt Dun** 0413 113 352
Catherine West: 0415 928 211

Richard Wilkinson background information

<https://asmr.org.au/asmr-mrw/media/>