

**159** *INTERSECTORAL ACTION FOR HEALTH IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T*

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The recognition that many of the determinants of health are beyond the control of the health sector has driven health professionals to develop intersectoral partnerships to promote the development of supportive environments for health and minimise the elements that predispose communities to ill health. An intersectoral community-based intervention was implemented in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in South Western Sydney to improve health, safety and service delivery through community participation. A mixed-methodology evaluation was undertaken including cross-sectional randomised household surveys in 1999, 2002 and 2005 and qualitative interviews with key partners and community representatives.

In the first three years, the intervention developed through population level investments via urban renewal activities and community development programs. The intervention resulted in community perceptions of increased health, safety, amenity and perceived reductions in crime. Following a three year re-funding period and substantial changes in partnership structures, which saw a shift in investments to the provision of specific services to at-risk groups, significant increases in community perceptions of crime and decreases in perceptions of health and safety resulted.

This paper describes the findings of the evaluation in relation to the role of intersectoral community-based intervention in promoting healthy communities. It will provide evidence for discussion about the types of investments most likely to result in effective, efficient and sustainable change in health practice when seeking to address the underlying determinants of health in disadvantaged populations.