



DEDICATION

Dr Anthony Joffe

1965 - 2006

The 2007 report of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health is dedicated to the memory of Dr Anthony Joffe, who played an instrumental role in cementing the partnership on which the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health is based. Anthony was the first registrar to participate in the successful initiative between the Medical Research Council (Environment & Health Research Unit) and the University of the Witwatersrand (School of Public Health) to provide registrars undertaking a speciality in Public Health Medicine, with environmental health research experience. During his six-month placement at the MRC, Anthony focused on children's environmental health. Extracts from this work have been submitted for publication.

Anthony's sudden and tragic death in a horse-riding incident came as a shock to all who knew him.



ABBREVIATIONS

- AMAP** Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme
- CEH** Children's Environmental Health
- CSDH** Commission on the Social Determinants of Health
- DoH** Department of Health (National)
- DST** Department of Science & Technology
- EHP** Environmental Health Practitioner
- CoJ** City of Johannesburg
- HEAD** Health, Environment & Development study
- MRC** Medical Research Council (South Africa)
- PTS** Persistent toxic substances
- QoL** Quality of life
- SPH** School of Public Health
- UJ** University of Johannesburg
- WHA** World Health Assembly
- WHO** World Health Organization
- WHO-AFRO** World Health Organization – African Region
- Wits** University of the Witwatersrand



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The growing accomplishments of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health (WHOCCUH) are possible only because of the contributions and dedication of its partner organizations and individual participants. The four core organizational partners are:

- The South African Medical Research Council (MRC);
- The University of Johannesburg (UJ);
- The City of Johannesburg (CoJ); and
- The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

We would like to express our special thanks to the members of the annual Advisory Panels who are willing to give their time, and share their expertise and wisdom with us each year. Their input is a vital aspect of the growing strength and productivity of the WHOCCUH.



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Staff of the WHOCCUH with members of the Advisory Panel

PREFACE

The World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health (WHOCCUH) is a partnership involving a research organization (the South African Medical Research Council), academic and training institutions (the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg) and a local government service provider (the City of Johannesburg).

The over-arching goal of the partnership is to improve urban health through pooling the experiences and expertise of the four partners. The work of the WHOCCUH is guided by a set of Terms of Reference (see Section VI) agreed with the World Health Organization.

The Centre is committed to a sustainable development model that encourages community participation and addresses inequities in access to resources and services. The well-being and health needs of the most vulnerable, low-income urban populations are at the heart of the work of the Centre.

Although located in a South African setting, the WHOCCUH recognises that similar urban health challenges face many African countries, and aims to contribute to finding solutions of relevance to the entire continent.

This report outlines the areas of work and achievements of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health for the period of September 2006 to August 2007.



TERMS OF REFERENCE

The original terms of reference for the Centre were established jointly in 1995 by the partners in the Centre, and representatives from the World Health Organization's (WHO) Geneva headquarters and the African Regional Office. These terms of reference were reviewed and agreed to by, then South African Minister of Health, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

The terms of reference are:

1. to collaborate with WHO in the development of urban health, environment and sustainable development policy, programmes and projects in the African region, particularly within southern Africa;
2. to facilitate, undertake and participate in the design and conduct of research on health and environment determinants, and their management in human settlements;
3. to collaborate with WHO Environmental Health Centres and WHO Collaborating Centres in the fields of urban health, environment and sustainable development;
4. to collaborate in strengthening technical and scientific collaboration with member states in the WHO African region in the development of capacity building (human resources and institutional development) in the fields of urban health, environment and sustainable development;
5. to collaborate with the WHO in the development and updating of curricula of health and environment-related professionals (including environmental health professionals) to address emerging urban health, environment and sustainable development issues;
6. to contribute to the development of more effective and efficient approaches to the delivery of appropriate services to promote urban health, the environment and sustainable development; and
7. to promote models for integrated and sustainable development, urban health and quality of life, as in the Healthy Cities Project and urban aspects of the Healthy Environments for Children initiative, with special emphasis on inter-sectoral collaboration and health advocacy.



1. BACKGROUND

A recent exhibition at the Tate-Modern Gallery in London provided powerful visual illustrations of the increasing importance of cities in modern life. In 2007, for the first time in its history, the majority of the world's people will be living in cities. The health of the world's people therefore, is increasingly a matter of URBAN HEALTH, making the work of bodies such as the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Urban Health (WHOCCUH) of increasing importance and relevance in the world today.

The rapid pace of urbanization in some parts of the world is cause for concern. Since 1900, for example, the City of London has grown by 10%. In stark contrast, over the same period, Sao Paulo has grown by 7400%. Within the southern African region, the City of Johannesburg, especially when considered in the context of surrounding urban centres such as Ekurhuleni and Pretoria, has grown rapidly. The fallout of the rapid growth in human numbers, where it has exceeded the pace of delivery of housing and health infrastructure to meet demand, may be seen in areas of concentrated disadvantage, such as informal settlements, degraded inner city areas and certain mass-based low-cost housing developments. These areas are the focus of the WHOCCUH's Health, Environment and Development (HEAD) study, which aims to monitor changes in living conditions and health status, alongside local government development initiatives.

Implementation of the HEAD study over the past two years has proved to be valuable because of the information delivered, as well for its role in cementing the progress made in recent years in building the WHOCCUH partnership. The HEAD study is a panel study, and in 2007 the second wave of data collection on households in five relatively impoverished Johannesburg settlements was conducted. Preliminary study findings have highlighted key concerns, such as high burdens of chronic ill health, low levels of exercise (especially in women), high levels of violence, high levels of mobility in sites such as Hillbrow, extensive noise annoyance and multiple burdens of ill health (acute, chronic and violence) in the poorest communities.

The HEAD study is also proving to be an important vehicle for research capacity development for undergraduate, Masters and doctoral students. In addition to around 50 undergraduate students who annually receive experiential environmental health research training under the umbrella of the HEAD study, currently one Masters student and three doctoral students are undertaking research using the HEAD study database.

This report provides a broad outline of the main activities undertaken in 2007 to ensure that the Terms of Reference are met, and that the work of the WHOCCUH is relevant, and contributes to the resolution of African urban health challenges. The report will also provide an indication of the intended focus areas and priorities for the WHOCCUH in the year ahead.

