

CHOOSING HEALTH CARE: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING HOW AUSTRALIANS NAVIGATE THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE HEALTH CARE MAZE



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The Australian health system is a complex mix of public and private health care. While there is a strong public system, and universal access to medical services, in recent years, health policy has focused on individuals taking responsibility for their health through taking out private health insurance for hospital cover. The notion of 'choice' has been integral to such emphasis. Our Australian Research Council Project is examining the unequal capacity of Australians to make health choices. We will analyse the policy, marketing and media contexts, the role of doctors and other health system gatekeepers, and individual health consumers' perceptions and exercise of choice to demonstrate how Australians navigate the public/private healthcare maze. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of 'capital' we are exploring the constituent parts of 'health care capital'. In this presentation I will outline the program of research conducted so far and the use of Bourdieu to inform our approach. I will be particularly interested in exploring synergies between the Australian and Canadian health care contexts.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Associate Professor Karen Willis is a health sociologist and qualitative researcher. She is currently Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney. Her research focuses on health behaviours and their links with broader social and policy ideas. Two current research projects are investigating health care choice in the Australian health care system, and how women 'live well' with metastatic breast cancer. She has also researched the policy context and mammography screening; the use of complementary therapies for fertility enhancement; the use of St Johns Wart for 'stress, depression and worries'; chronic disease self management; and the strategies farmers and fishers use to 'stay healthy' in difficult economic and climatic times.