



"IT REINFORCES THE NEED FOR BROAD-BASED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES THAT FOCUS ON CREATING ENVIRONMENTS THAT MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES EASIER."

World view on indigenous health

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Mihi Ratima relished the chance to learn from world leaders in public health research during her Commonwealth Fund Harkness Fellowship.

The Director of AUT's Taupua Wairoa Centre for Maori Health Research was awarded the year-long fellowship at Harvard University, which spanned 2006-07.

Associate Professor Ratima was jointly appointed to the Harvard School of Public Health and the Brigham and Women's Hospital (a teaching affiliate of the medical school). She used the opportunity to study obesity prevention among indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in the United States.

"I interviewed experts in the field including academics, policy analysts, health promoters and health practitioners. I also examined two obesity prevention interventions as case studies to explore promising approaches to intervention."

The first is a Native Alaskan-owned primary health care intervention provided by the South Central Foundation which aims to prevent obesity among indigenous peoples. The second, Healthy Eating Active Communities, is a four year US\$26 million initiative that aims to fight childhood obesity in California through state and local policy changes to reduce the risk factors for obesity and facilitate healthy eating and physical activity environments.

"The research, which I am in the process of writing up, highlights ethnic differences in the immediate and distal causes and patterns of obesity, as well as in behaviour change incentives and disincentives. It reinforces the need for broad-based intervention strategies that focus on creating environments that make healthy choices easier. I am also identifying key success factors underpinning promising intervention strategies in the United States for indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities."

The fellowship gave Associate Professor Ratima the opportunity to meet with and learn from some of the leading United States and Canadian commentators on health care policy.

This research fits in well with Taupua Wairoa's role. The centre was set up to make a significant and distinctive contribution to reducing inequalities in health and improving Maori health outcomes through robust Maori health research.

"There was a great deal of interest in the research we are carrying out at AUT on indigenous peoples health and in public health more generally - so I was able to share our experiences in a way that enabled a two way exchange of ideas."