



EDITORIAL

Journal of Community Systems for Health at 18 months: reflections on our journey so far and looking ahead

Editorial Board^{1*}

¹Journal of Community Systems for Health

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As we are approaching 18 months since the birth of the Journal of Community Systems for Health (JCSH), it feels important to pause and reflect. This journal was created with a simple but ambitious idea: to build a space where community-rooted knowledge, interdisciplinary practice, and systems thinking could meet on equal terms. We wanted a journal that recognised that health emerges not from isolated interventions, but from relationships, governance, histories, and social structures that shape people's everyday lives. Today, that vision feels not only relevant but increasingly urgent.

The past eighteen months have shown us that researchers, practitioners, and community organisations across the world are looking for a platform that values collaboration, reflexivity, and equity. We have seen contributions from authors working in public health, social sciences, Indigenous health, education and community development. More importantly, we have seen work that does not fit neatly into traditional disciplinary boundaries; precisely the kind of knowledge needed to understand and strengthen community systems for health.

During our first 18 months, we published 4 editorials, 28 original articles, 3 reviews, 3 "Lessons and experiences", 2 "Conversations with", 1 study protocol, 1 PhD review, and 1 commentary. In addition, as part of a Special Issue on Indigenous Health, we published 6 original articles, 2 reviews, 1 "Lessons and experiences" article, and 1 study protocol.

From the outset, JCSH invited contributions that move across sectors and forms of expertise. Building on this diversity, we have published studies using community system approaches to understand service bottlenecks, ethnographies of community health workers, analyses of governance structures, and evaluations of participatory health programmes in Indigenous, rural, and urban settings.

One of our explicit aims was to ensure the journal values practice-generated knowledge as much as academic theory. We have therefore welcomed articles led by community organisations, NGOs, frontline workers,

and local policymakers. Many of these contributions have highlighted innovations that rarely enter mainstream academic discourse: hybrid health–education interventions, locally adapted governance models, and decolonial approaches that centre Indigenous worldviews. Together, these insights reaffirm that meaningful improvements in health systems often begin at the community level.

One of the distinctive achievements of JCSH is that we have shown that it is possible to initiate and sustain an affordable open access publishing model rooted in public interest institutions and networks, rather than commercial and profit driven motives. In an era when "open access" often means high article processing charges (APC) that exclude many practitioners, early-career scholars, community organisations, and researchers from low- and middle-income countries, JCSH chose a different path. We are open access in the truest sense: free to publish, free to read, and free for authors and communities to use. This model matters because APC-driven publishing risks reinforcing global inequities by placing financial barriers on who gets to contribute to scientific discourse.

Equity is at the heart of our work, and we have taken steps to reflect this not only in our content but in our publishing practices. We have:

- supported authors writing in English as an additional language;
- encouraged submissions from community organisations and practitioners;
- maintained reviewer practices that emphasise constructive, developmental feedback;
- welcomed collaborative authorship that includes community partners;
- encouraged work that challenges power imbalances and rethinks knowledge ownership.

These efforts have strengthened both the quality and diversity of our authorship.

A central question during the journal's launch in October 2024 was how to uphold quality without discouraging innovative or community-based work. Our solution has been to cultivate a culture of peer review defined by clarity, respect, and improvement rather than gatekeeping. Reviewers are selected not only for disciplinary expertise but for their understanding of community systems, participatory methodologies, and health systems thinking. This has enriched the review process and helped strengthen manuscripts through dialogue rather than rejection.

Our journal is committed to confronting inequities that shape both health outcomes and the production of academic knowledge. This includes supporting Indigenous methodologies, exploring colonial histories, and questioning power dynamics embedded in research and governance. We will continue to welcome contributions that challenge the status quo and propose new forms of health system transformation.

As we look ahead, we want to remain accessible while upholding high standards. As submissions grow, we will continue building a community of editors and

reviewers committed to constructive, fair, and context-sensitive evaluation. To maintain our ethos of supportive, timely, and relational publishing, we will continue to expand our editorial and reviewer networks. The rise of AI tools, evolving norms around open science, and debates about community data sovereignty all pose challenges. JCSH will remain committed to ethical practice, transparency, and protecting communities' rights and interests. We are actively working to expand our visibility across multiple platforms, including PubMed and others. As we finalise agreements with additional databases, all previously published manuscripts will be added retroactively to ensure broad and consistent access to our work—past, present, and future.

To all authors, reviewers, readers, and community partners who have supported the journal in its first 18 months: thank you. Your work, your trust, and your willingness to help build this platform have made this milestone possible. As we reflect on our journey so far and look ahead to what we can achieve together, we warmly welcome all who share our commitment to join us in shaping the next stage of the Journal of Community Systems for Health.