In both Australia and Chile, the identification of Indigenous people is necessary for setting health targets and priorities, ensuring accessible and appropriate health care and gathering data on Indigenous health outcomes. However, Indigenous identification continues to be a challenge in both countries.

In 2005, Chile’s Ministry of Health initiated a project to gauge the inequity gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Professor Oyarce will speak about her work in relation to developing an innovative strategy, developed for this purpose, which includes a variable to distinguish different ethnic groups in current morbidity/mortality records—an approach that makes it possible to assess the health conditions of Indigenous peoples as a distinct group. The research reveals systematic gaps, evidenced through higher morbidity/mortality rates among indigenous peoples, especially for indicators that reflect social injustice, such as infant mortality rates and mortality due to tuberculosis.

Although these assessments can indeed be conducted, the process is complex, and requires that ethnic factors be included in examining data sources and health records. At the same time, efforts must be made to guarantee the right of indigenous peoples to self-identify, and to ensure that systematic information is collected to aid in monitoring public policy.

The seminar will also cover issues central to identification of Indigenous people. On one hand, the problem of validity and, on the other, the questions of what we are measuring? Are we measuring what we want to measure? And, even more importantly, what DO we want to measure?

Professor Ana María Oyarce is based across the University of Chile, the UN’s Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) and the World Health Organisation.

Professor Oyarce is a medical anthropologist with a particular interest in racial and ethnic disparities in health, intercultural health and the role of epidemiological data in ensuring health equity. She studied anthropology at the University of Chile until September 1973, and later continued her studies in Temuco, Chile under the direction of Czech anthropologist Milan Stuchlik. She graduated as a medical anthropologist in 1977, when her thesis topic addressed the perception of infant nutrition in a Mapuche (Chilean Indigenous) community. She is a recognised expert on Aboriginal health and ethnic disparities in health and has authored dozens of reports, manuscripts and books in these fields.