Relatively little is known about the comparability of socioeconomic inequalities in health across well-developed countries and when during the lifecourse these inequalities emerge. Research has shown that low birthweight is an important marker for health over the life course. In the United States, there is clear evidence of a socioeconomic gradient in this marker of health at the "starting gate," but little is known about how that gradient compares to other countries. This lecture uses nationally representative data from four countries - Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States - to compare socioeconomic gradients in low birthweight across countries that share many cultural features but differ in terms of public support and healthcare systems. Preliminary results demonstrate a general pattern of socioeconomic inequality in low birthweight in all four countries. However, the magnitude of the socioeconomic gradient varies by country, and it appears that the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia are better able to buffer some of the most deleterious effects of socioeconomic inequality compared to the United States.

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Dr. Melissa Martinson’s research focuses on inequities in health and wellbeing throughout the life span, both in the United States and internationally. In particular, her work examines the wide health divide between the United States and other wealthy, developed nations. Within that comparative context, Dr. Martinson’s research aims to understand and alleviate health disparities by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status and immigrant status.