

Improving the health of communities through participation

A whole of organisation, whole of community project to embed community participation in



The involvement of community members in service design, delivery and evaluation is mandated in Australian Quality and Safety Standards but there is little evidence on how this can be achieved. The Board and staff of Rural Northwest Health (RNH) are committed to Victorian leadership in this area and partnered with world-class researchers from La Trobe University to develop a highly innovative approach to community participation. RNH funded a full time PhD student who worked with stakeholders, developing a series of community driven workshops based on the award winning Scottish, evidence based community participation method; Remote Services Futures (RSF).

24 workshops, 500 people (in a community of 6500) - Agreed health priorities to achieve locally responsive, cost effective solutions to target poor health outcomes.

- The aims of the project were to:
- Develop a sustainable mechanism of working with community members to explore and test ideas, and in partnership, design evidence-based approaches to maximize health outcomes.
 - Identify priorities and capture innovative approaches that communities design given a range of data, information and research evidence.
 - Forge a strong partnership with a leading university to ensure the project reflected world-class best evidence on community participation so that knowledge gained could be translated to the broader sector.



RNH previously had an ad hoc approach to conversations with consumers regarding service development - this was not targeted.

A new evidence-based community participation process implemented. International award winning Scottish evidence based method.

Community members were empowered with knowledge of the health of their community and service models. They were given knowledge of RNH budgets and how they are expended. Using novel participatory mapping they identified places that affected their health and wellbeing.

OUTCOMES
Major mental health forums, including an ICE drug forum attended by 350 people.
Community gardens in three communities to support intergenerational socialisation and distribution of health information.
Aged care expos in two communities.
Age friendly gymnasium equipment in community spaces to promote exercise amongst older people and people with disability.

THIS PROJECT PROVIDES EVIDENCE BASED KNOWLEDGE THAT IS TRANSFERABLE TO OTHER HEALTH CARE CONTEXTS

- The purpose and rationale for community participation
- How evidence based community participation can be implemented at a service level.
- The benefits, barriers and challenges of enacting community participation.
- The value of formalized community participation processes and geographical mapping to ensure Board priorities meet community need.
- Practical strategies for implementing community participation projects.