

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Collaborative Community-Based Planning for Integrated Primary Health Services

21st International Conference on Integrated Care, Virtual Conference – May 2021

Richard Colbran¹, Sarah Davies

1: NSW Rural Doctors Network, Australia

Introduction

Providing accessible, sustainable, appropriate primary health care services is challenging in small rural and remote communities. Increased costs and difficulties of workforce recruitment and retention are compounded by lack of economies of scale. The western and south-western (Murrumbidgee) regions of New South Wales (NSW), Australia cover 558,622 square kilometres with a population of only 553,128 representing many of these challenges, further exacerbated by a health system with multiple funding and delivery mechanisms often resulting in fragmentation, duplication and competition.

Short description of practice change implemented

Beginning with commitment to high-level cooperation between four key health agencies in western NSW, a 'Collaborative Care' initiative was developed to explore models of care in rural locations where local partners and community are empowered to implement a place-based community development approach to integrated health service and workforce planning.

Aim and theory of change

Collaborative Care aims to improve access to quality, sustainable primary health services in rural NSW. By building partnerships to implement the collaborative care approach, health literacy and planning capacity among stakeholders will be strengthened, facilitating increased service integration and testing of new models of health workforce and service delivery. Well-functioning, sustainable models and supportive communities contribute to attracting and retaining health professionals.

Targeted population and stakeholders

Stakeholders in five NSW locations including community members, public and private health service providers, local, state and federal government and organisations involved in training, recruiting and supporting health professionals.

Timeline

The cooperative commitment in western NSW was formalised in 2018. By 2021, three collaborative initiatives were proceeding under this guiding coalition including Collaborative Care with the Murrumbidgee region.

Highlights

More than 50 organisations participated in developing an action framework to address primary health workforce issues. Engaging communities around a common understanding of issues and goals for primary health services enabled development, testing and acceptance of new approaches. An integrated team-based care model reports improved capability and financial sustainability for health professionals. Demonstrated collaboration has resulted in increased interest, increased health workforce literacy, commitment to work together for change and increased funding from government.

Sustainability

Engaging community stakeholders and establishing strong systems for collaborative governance sets the foundation to build trust and empower local actors to manage and mitigate workforce issues over the long-term.

Transfer-ability

Collaborative activities include collection of evidence and development and dissemination of tools that can be adapted for use in other communities.

Conclusions

Investing time and resources in building relationships and facilitating improved coordination around a shared vision enables development of collaborative solutions. These have improved health service access and integration in Collaborative Care locations and encourage sustainability.

Discussions

No single model of health service delivery is suited to all circumstances. Instead, a variety of models that can be tailored to suit the local context is needed, underpinned however, by common guiding principles, a philosophy of community-based planning and a commitment to partnership.

Lessons learned

Developing successful partnerships and community-based planning improves health workforce literacy bringing fresh approaches to long-standing problems. It also takes time and shared commitment.