

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Establishing a rural research network to promote capacity and capability within rural communities in New Zealand

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Introduction: The 620,000 people living in rural Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) have overall poorer health compared to their urban peers. They experience difficulties obtaining quality, specialist, and accessible diagnostic services in particular. These factors can compound for rural Māori.

The well-being of our rural people is an economic and social issue, significant to the economic development of NZ's rural sector and the prosperity of NZ's primary industries.

Description of policy context and objective: The Rural Aotearoa Research Network (RAOR) is a collaboration between health professionals, academics, community members, rural organisations, and hapū and iwi established to:

Span the gaps between research outputs and quality improvement, enhancing policy and practice.

Bridge the gap between the focus of research projects and matters of particular importance to the rural sector and communities.

Increasing research capacity in the rural sector by working alongside and supporting network members.

Strategies used by RAOR to achieve these include but are not limited to, contestable funding for quality improvement initiatives; providing research colloquium, presence at rural field days events, offering a rural outreach service and news provision and narrow casting.

Targeted population: RAOR aims to enhance the well-being of those who live and work in rural communities and improve the job satisfaction and retention of rural health professionals.

Highlights: RAOR achieved an establishment award of \$100,000, which gained significant rural and health media coverage. It has held a successful Sandpit event and is now working with two rural organisations and has two rural research projects underway. Indicators to evaluate its success have been established and include the number of individuals and organisations who are members, the number of collaborative projects undertaken; the number of people engaged with during field day events, the number of research projects completed and associated outputs

and website analytics including post and comment numbers on the discussion board, tracking of level of engagement over timeline and who is engaging.

Comments on transferability: The process undertaken to establish RAOR is in principal transferrable. Certain nuances of the process could be more or less applicable to different jurisdictions. For instance, establishing partnerships with Māori.

Conclusion: RAOR had strong support prior to its establishment and has since gained more energy and enthusiasm from across the rural sector. Key to the successes so far have been: finding collaborators with 'like minds'; communication; relationship building; and taking opportunities when they arise.

Keywords: rural; research network



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