

ABSTRACT APPLICATION

TITLE OF PRESENTATION: Rural-proofing disability policy: engaging policy makers and service providers in bridging the research-policy gap.

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ABSTRACT

Background:

The Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes (WH&DS) project aims to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based policies to support therapy service delivery to people with disability living in rural communities in western New South Wales (NSW). This NHMRC funded 'Partnerships for Better Health' project is in its fourth and final year. An initial review of relevant policy documents revealed a lack of attention to the inequities encountered by people who live and work in rural areas. Strategies to ensure more equitable access are known as rural-proofing.

Aims:

- Better understand the place of research in the disability policy making process in NSW;
- Raise awareness of rural issues for people with disability among policy makers and service providers;
- Identify strategies for increasing the access and application of rural disability research in the policy making process.

Methods: We held two forums to discuss the gap between research and policy. The forums were facilitated by an external international expert in knowledge translation. The first forum was conducted with policy makers from relevant NSW state government departments. The second forum was held with senior staff from NSW non-government and advocacy disability agencies. The forums provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of how participants value and access research to inform their work. The forums were designed so participants and researchers could jointly develop effective knowledge translation strategies. Strategies had applicability to the knowledge gained from our rural disability research. Data was collected via pre- and post- forum surveys and observational notes. All data were analysed using constant comparison to identify themes.

Results: Participants identified research as only one of a number of sources informing policy. Participants identified lack of time to access research as a main barrier to its use in policy formation. In addition to traditional ways of accessing research via peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations, participants identified a preference for receiving research findings in synthesised 'policy ready' formats with policy relevant recommendations. In response, the Wobbly Hub team developed a range of knowledge translation strategies to promote the rural-proofing of policy. This presentation will describe the forums and the strategies adopted as a result.