Background

Lessons to share about planning, implementing and evaluating programs involving community based workers

Trachoma

In 2009, the Australian Government committed funding to eradicate endemic trachoma from remote Aboriginal communities by 2020. Trachoma is an infection that, if untreated, can cause blindness. Australia is the only developed country with endemic trachoma, affecting Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (NT), South Australia (SA) and Western Australia (WA).

Past experience

The Foundation had experience with the benefits and challenges of involving Community Based Workers (CBWs) in the Early Childhood Nutrition and Anaemia Prevention Project (ECNAPP) in 2010-12. One of the project’s aims was to build capacity of a community based nutrition workforce, health services, and other relevant organisations, through a number of strategies to deliver project activities. The final evaluation of the project showed that the CBWs played an important role in outreach and community based health promotion. This role was generally highly regarded by community members, the key audience for this project.

Trachoma Elimination Project

Building on The Foundation’s experience, over 30 CBWs were employed in more than 10 remote communities in the NT to assist in eliminating trachoma. Direct funding was provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) responsible for service delivery to communities with a high prevalence of trachoma. In addition, funding was allocated to assist the NT Department of Health in high prevalence communities in its jurisdiction. The aims were to increase the number of Aboriginal Australians being screened and treated for trachoma in communities where it is endemic and to improve hygiene behaviour that is important for the prevention of trachoma.

Role of CBWs

The CBWs’ role is to engage community members in supporting screening and treatment by Trachoma Nurses, employed by the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the NT Department of Health or by ACCHOs. CBWs were also expected to help create and support community health promotion initiatives, focused on the adoption and strengthening of hygiene behaviour, such as face washing. These behaviours will assist in preventing the transmission and reoccurrence of trachoma after treatment.
Review

In 2013, The Foundation commissioned Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services to undertake a review of the CBW component to inform program improvement. The international literature on CBWs was assessed and an audit of current practices and experiences of programs employing CBWs in remote communities, primarily in the NT, was also commissioned. One of the aims was to learn about sound practices so these could be recorded and shared with others to create a best practice model for organisations who either currently employ CBWs or plan to in the future.

A rapid evidence assessment was used to review the available international literature on models of employing and supporting CBWs. One of the findings was that reviews and reports detailing sound practice in recruiting, employing, training and supporting CBWs are lacking. There is a large ‘knowledge gap’ with regard to what works and what does not. For the audit, an on-line survey of program managers and coordinators with experience employing and working with CBWs in remote Aboriginal communities was conducted in order to determine how organisations currently manage CBWs and to identify what has worked well. A total of 37 people were identified as knowledgeable about the employment and support of CBWs in a range of organisations and 23 of them responded.

Findings

The key findings from the review of the international literature and the results of the audit are reported in a series of information sheets titled ‘Lessons Learned’. They outline the practices that work – the practice based evidence – for successfully employing CBWs in programs and projects that require a strong link between the community and the program to ensure program effectiveness.

Accompanying some of the ‘Lessons Learned’ are ‘Examples from the Field’. They provide a more in depth exploration of certain practices and discuss what has worked well and why from an organisational perspective. They also report on useful methods and tools for the planning and evaluation of programs involving CBWs.

The Foundation would like to acknowledge and thank:

- Program managers and coordinators that responded to the survey and shared their knowledge so that others supporting CBWs can learn from their experiences
- Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services for their wisdom and hard work
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress for critiquing the drafts.

The Foundation welcomes your comments on this series of information sheets and any suggestions for improvements. Please let us know if you have an example that you would like to share and / or whether you found them useful or not. All feedback will be appreciated.
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References


This publication may contain images of persons that have passed away. The Fred Hollows Foundation would like to acknowledge these persons and pay our respects to them and their families.

Developed by Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services in collaboration with The Fred Hollows Foundation Indigenous Australia Program.

Additional information about the development of this project can be found at http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources/?lid=30884

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