

Towards defining rural and remote "allied health" professions

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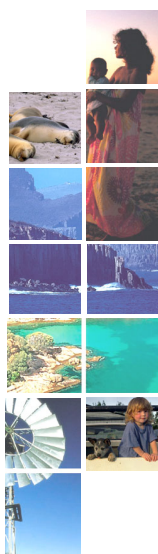
Formulating a working definition of allied health as applicable to rural and remote Australia is a key outcome of the National Rural and Remote Allied Health Advisory Service (NRRAHAS). The development of the definition of allied health is now a key outcome in the funding contract signed between Services for Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH), on behalf of the joint partner ARRAHT of the HPCA, and the Commonwealth's Office of Rural Health.

Allied health professionals have been defined in many ways over recent years, leading to some confusion and lack of uniformity in dealing with issues relating to allied health professionals and the services they provide both at state and Commonwealth level. The most simplistic, collective usage of the phrase "allied health" is used to mean health professionals other than doctors and nurses. Organisations and workforce reviews utilising "allied health" in their title, narrow the definition to a varied but similar grouping of health professionals. Clarifying the definition of allied health is considered essential for future rural and remote health policy development. Clarification may be assisted by differentiating between services provided by allied health professionals as distinguished by the working definition and other services provided by a broad range of other qualified health professionals.

Once the working definition of allied health as applicable to rural and remote Australia is formulated, outcomes sought will include a level of agreement between key stakeholders across Commonwealth and state jurisdictions, concerning the implementation of the working definition of allied health professionals and professions, and that this working definition of rural and remote allied health is utilised in policy writing and projects relating to the rural and remote allied health workforce.

It is essential in the development of this definition that all key stakeholders are consulted and this conference gives NRRAHAS prime opportunity to consult with health professionals and consumers from across rural and remote Australia. The definition, as it has been developed to February 2003, will be presented and comments and feedback called for from the delegates.

The full paper for this will be published on the following website: www.sarrah.org.au
 (Please note this website is currently under construction)



PRESENTERS

Robyn Adams is Physiotherapy Manager at Bathurst Base Hospital, with qualifications both in physiotherapy and health service management. She currently holds the positions of President, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH), Joint Project Manager, National Rural and Remote Allied Health Advisory Service and the Commonwealth Allied Health Rural and Remote Scholarships: Postgraduate Scheme and is NSW State Councillor on the Health and Research Employees Association. Robyn is SARRAH representative to the National Rural Health Alliance, NSW Allied Health Consultative Forum and NSW Regional Health Service Advisory Committee.

Since graduation in 1975, Robyn has worked in both metropolitan and rural settings, predominantly in the public sector, but stints in both the private sector and the academic sector contribute to a broad range of experience.

Since the late 80s Robyn has been actively involved at various levels in professional organisations such as the APA and SARRAH. The focus for her lobbying and action in representative positions includes profiling the challenges facing delivery of services in the public sector, particularly in rural areas, with recruitment and retention of staff, along with the equitable distribution and staffing of service, ranking as key challenges.

Shelagh Lowe is a physiotherapist from the east coast of Tasmania. She became the Tasmanian representative of the Australian Physiotherapy Association's National Rural Issues Committee in 1997 and is SARRAH representative on the Tasmanian Rural Health Partnership. Nominated as the APA representative to the Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health Taskforce of the Health Professions Council of Australia in 1999, she took on the role as Convenor and delegate to the National Rural Health Alliance in April 2000. As Convenor of ARRAHT, Shelagh is Joint Project Manager of the National Rural and Remote Allied Health Advisory Service and the Commonwealth Allied Health Rural and Remote Scholarships: Postgraduate Scheme. Shelagh currently has the position of Deputy Chairperson of the NRHA and is convenor of the 7th National Rural Health Conference. She is the NRHA representative on the Commonwealth's National Health Priority Action Area Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Conditions Advisory Group. With a passionate interest in rural health, Shelagh is enjoying the opportunities presented to advocate nationally for improved health in rural communities through the provision of well-resourced and supported allied health services.

