

## Getting research evidence into rural health policies: what does it take?

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University and government libraries are replete with academic publications, journal articles and reports relating to rural health. While these publications help us to better understand rural health issues and recommend ways to improve rural health outcomes, often this research evidence is not taken up in rural health policies or implemented in rural health programs. This paper outlines one approach to improve uptake of rural health research into policy.

Clearly one key requirement is to present research results in a format that is relevant, concise, timely, and easily assimilated by bureaucrats and politicians. What is not so easily recognised is the need to harness and monitor research take-up to show how it can produce positive outcomes and allay the risk-aversion so often characterising governments with respect to innovative ideas.

This paper demonstrates a new tool for recording and monitoring the impact of research, and shows how its use can help maximise the take-up and implementation of research evidence into rural health policy and practice. This new '*research impact database*' builds upon an innovative conceptualisation of knowledge transfer. It shows (i) how research evidence impacts upon different constituents, including consumers, practitioners, policymakers, governments and professional bodies, (ii) the nature and scope of the impact, and (iii) how the research evidence can be organised to target the problem effectively.

This new '*research impact database*' helps researchers, funders and policymakers in several ways. First, they can gauge who is affected by the research outcomes. Secondly, by organising the ways in which the research impacts on activities, the database helps to identify the nature of any economic, political or other 'risks' associated with adoption of research evidence into policy and practice. Thirdly, the summarised output helps identify what steps may be needed to ensure effective implementation into policy and practice.

Unless rural health researchers can demonstrate the impact of their research, and the effective take-up and implementation into policy, rural health problems will persist unnecessarily. Moreover, previous studies may be unnecessarily replicated in the quest to find solutions to the existing unacceptable urban-rural health divide.