

The health behaviours of rural SA men's shed participants

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Background: Australian men's shed participants are generally older, retired, blue collar, rural men often with low levels of educational attainment and suffering socioeconomic disadvantage, which are all characteristics which place them at higher risk of adverse health outcomes. Correspondingly the National Male Health Policy highlights men's sheds as potential vehicle for health promotion activities targeting this at risk group older men. However, for these programs to be effective it is important to better understand the health status, concerns, and health seeking behaviours of the men who attend men's sheds.

Aim: The aim of this project was to determine the health status, health concerns, health knowledge and health seeking behaviour of participants of rural SA men's sheds as a prelude to the design of health promotion activities for men in SA sheds.

Method: A cross sectional, quantitative, exploratory study design was used with data collected using a self-administered paper based survey across 11 of 25 rural South Australian men's sheds.

Results: 154 surveys were returned, identifying a mostly older, retired, lesser educated population. There was a high incidence of obesity and chronic disease, most commonly Type 2 diabetes, depression and cancer. Physical health was the category rated most highly as a concern with the prostate and the heart being the topics for which information was most commonly requested. A significant proportion of participants were interested in information about psychological health suggesting that incidence of mental health concerns was higher than reported. Participants were likely to have seen a GP or other health professional in the previous 12 months, mostly for preventative checks, pain or functional disability. There were knowledge deficits evident regarding the prostate, reproductive health and psychological health. The preferred method of health information delivery was through hands-on, practical approaches.

Conclusion: Men in rural SA sheds report a high incidence of chronic disease together with key knowledge deficits in areas of reproductive, prostate and psychological health. Health promotion programs that target men in sheds should take a hands-on approach and incorporate the above topics as a priority.