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The future of allied health student placements in rural NDIS funded services

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Abstract

To expand the rural health workforce, nursing and allied health students undertake placements in rural settings. The University of Melbourne Department of Rural Health encourage these students to undertake placements in community and non-health settings to experience new roles for health professionals. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is transforming the way some of these services are provided to people with disability in Australia by shifting funding to a fee-for-service model. The impact of this funding shift on organisational activities, including the placement and supervision of allied health students, is largely unknown. Given the substantive role student placements play in securing the future rural allied health workforce in Australia, this study aimed to explore the perceived impacts of the NDIS on allied health student placements among staff in organisations funded at least partly by the NDIS and located in rural areas of Victoria.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 20 health professionals in 16 health and human service organisations across rural Victoria, including six community health services, four hospitals, three disability services, and three private practices who were funded in part by the NDIS. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using enumerative and content analysis techniques.

Participants perceived the NDIS as having varied impacts on the nature of services and the capacity of organisations to conduct other activities, such as student placements. Eight participants—five in disability services and three in community health services, suggested the NDIS had significantly impacted student activities, supervision or organisational capacity to offer student placements. Angst during transition to the NDIS led to organisations halting placements. Insecure funding led to service closures, staff redundancies and increased casualisation which reduced capacity to place and supervise students. Participants were wary of involving students in services operating within a competitive market, and at times narrowed students' involvement. Many participants believed the NDIS student placement policy failed to address the financial barriers to student placements in a fee-for-service funding model. Participants considered placements as a vital means for rural organisations to recruit allied health professionals and build the rural health workforce. They were concerned about a future without student placements.

The findings suggest the NDIS may reduce the number of allied health student placements in rural Victoria and diminish the rural allied health workforce, particularly in community-based

organisations servicing people with disability. Given the funding shift in the disability sector, organisations require additional financial incentives to place allied health students.

Presenter

Claire Quilliam is a Research Assistant with the University Department of Rural Health, University of Melbourne, in Shepparton, Victoria. Originally from Melbourne, Claire has worked with people with intellectual disability, their families, and local community organisations to promote opportunities for people with intellectual disability to lead meaningful lives in communities of their choice. Claire is now based in Shepparton with her family, completing a PhD at La Trobe University exploring frontline staffs' use of paperwork in disability services, and working at the University of Melbourne exploring the impacts of the NDIS on rural health and human services.