Connecting with the outback

Leigh-Anne Metcalfe, Tracy Cheffins, Rhonda Fleming
1Townsville-Mackay Medicare Local, Qld

Introduction: As a newcomer to rural and remote programs, Townsville-Mackay Medicare Local (TMML) has looked for opportunities to promote primary health care in outback areas. TMML were invited to participate in the inaugural ‘E-Village Outback Health and Fitness Muster’. This was held at Oak Park in far north Queensland, approximately 400 kilometres west of Townsville.

This poster will illustrate the program activities enjoyed by families living in the area who attended the muster.

Aims: TMML used this event as a two-fold opportunity. The first goal was to gather data for a needs analysis in remote areas to establish gaps in services and, secondly, to educate local residents about accessing primary health care and how to make the best use of a visit to a GP.

Key areas identified:

- allied health services appeared to be unavailable in this remote area
- people interviewed expressed the opinion that distances to access regular primary health care was a deterrent, especially to adult males
- adult males interviewed expressed the opinion that they only accessed primary health care for acute situations
- it appeared evident that no forward planning was made by patients to discuss chronic disease and preventative health plans
- participants of the Health Muster showed reticence to approach primary health care providers for information.

Conclusion: The event was well attended, with almost all of the 30 families living within a 200-kilometre radius of the area taking part. Children’s activities were the most utilised by the families; therefore for 2013 a focus on children’s activities would be concentrated on including education for parents on immunisation, thus creating opportunities to talk to parents about primary health care and a preventative approach to health for the whole family. Families
living in remote outback areas face many challenges in accessing appropriate health care and this can have a major impact on the overall quality of their lives.

This poster highlights the importance of engaging families in the outback and creating working partnerships with key stakeholders to achieve common goals.