

Rural research capacity building: a five-year case study

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The concept of local research support for rural communities has been an increasingly important development. Health and education innovations often need to be locally-run and tailored to be relevant to the local audience. Therefore they also need to be evaluated. These research and evaluation outcomes can then be fed back into improving future activities. Therefore, to ensure that this process becomes embedded there is a growing demand for local research support in rural areas. In particular, there is a need to increase the number of rural health workers and educators with knowledge and skills in evaluation and research methods. Five years ago, the appointment of a full-time academic at the School of Rural Health-Bairnsdale started the development of research support in the East Gippsland area. The program of research support developed was based on principles embedded in capacity building such as workforce development, organisational development and collaboration. Health professionals and educators had opportunities to learn about research methods and evaluation. Importantly, they were given the opportunity to then embed their learning, through engaging in their own research or evaluation. These projects were heavily supported by the local academic. The majority of this support involved one-on-one mentorship, alongside support for the project from their organisation to cover the health professional's time.

This presentation will outline the outcomes of 5 years of research support in East Gippsland. Outcomes have primarily been measured on staff engagement in research activities and conventional research outcomes. This presentation will highlight some of the research and evaluation support and activities conducted; as well as the enablers and barriers to embedding research and evaluation into everyday activities, and obviously where to from here. In conclusion, the early achievements demonstrate the potential of such a presence to have a real impact on activities in rural areas.