

## **'Rural in Reach': delivering health and wellbeing services to regional Western Australia**

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Often rural and remote communities are too small to support traditional models of health delivery locally, so residents must access care from larger urban centres. Unfortunately, access to health services provided in larger centres remains a problem for many residents of isolated settlements. In many cases, their inability to access health services when required results in health needs not being adequately met, lack of continuity of care and an absence of monitoring of the effectiveness of services in terms of health outcomes. It is clear that 'models of care in rural and remote areas must differ from those in metropolitan communities, incorporating strategies to account for these problems.

In 2011 a grant was made available by the Government of Western Australia's Department of Regional Development (funded by the Royalties for Regions program) and the West Australian Country Health Services for a four-year pilot project, now called Rural in Reach. The project aims to offer a range of services including one-to-one counselling support through video conferencing, community education/health promotion and professional development opportunities to women, their families and local agencies in rural and remote Western Australia.

In 2012 a West Australian University commenced a three year independent evaluation of the Rural in Reach project. The first year focused on process, the second year on impact and the third year on outcomes. The first major evaluation report (October 2013) indicated the project is a successful enterprise with a strong commitment from key stakeholders that it continues to increase rural and remote access to health and wellbeing services. The second report (March 2014) demonstrated conclusively that, over time, outputs are progressively greater in number and range and that outcomes for clients are very positive and far reaching benefiting the individual, their family and their community. The final report (January 2015) explored if and how the project is meeting the original objectives for the service. The three year evaluation demonstrated that the project is meeting these objectives in a principled, coherent manner. Outputs indicate that the project is an effective provider of counselling and allied health professional support services across rural and remote Western Australia. Concluding that this innovative, collaboratively designed and implemented project is probably the signpost to the future of allied health and wellbeing service delivery and community capacity building in rural and remote areas. This interactive presentation shares the evaluation findings and future recommendations.