



The Caring Communities Program: Second National Workshop Evaluation

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The second national workshop of the Caring Communities Program (CCP) took place in Adelaide in October 2004. This Bulletin summarises the group discussion which followed the concurrent sessions and presents findings from the workshop evaluation survey.

Workshop Summary

The national workshop was an opportunity for networking, information exchange and support among project officers and representatives of government and other agencies. CCP projects are funded under the National Palliative Care Strategy, which is designed to provide sustainable services and programs that meet the needs of local communities to support people who are dying.

Due to staff turnover and recruitment issues, for some participants this second workshop was the first opportunity to meet other project officers, government officers and members of the National Evaluation Team (NET). Themes of this workshop built on those of the first workshop, placing the CCP projects within the context of the National Palliative Care Strategy. These themes were:

- Capacity building and sustainability
- Communications and dissemination

In small groups during concurrent sessions, project officers presented 15-minute overviews of their progress to date, focusing on:

- What they had done
- How it had gone
- Lessons learned

The issues raised during these sessions were discussed with the whole group. Records of these discussions will inform the program level evaluation. The issues raised are summarised below under the following broad headings: stakeholder partnerships in the design phase; sustainability; biggest problems.

Stakeholder partnerships

It was agreed that the scoping phase of the projects was crucially important. This included tasks such as identifying gaps in services and areas where changes were needed, and collecting baseline data. The extent to which key stakeholders 'bought in' to the project in its early stages had impacts on its long-term viability and sustainability.

Potential barriers to building effective partnerships with stakeholders included the tendency for health professionals to want to control information. Ways of overcoming these difficulties were discussed. Some projects had successfully engaged general practitioners in training and clinical attachments by providing funding, running one-to-one workshops at convenient times, or negotiating reduced paperwork to enable GPs to claim points towards continuing medical education. Other projects had strengthened links between services (e.g., palliative and primary care) by involving support staff,

such as nurses in general practices, as palliative care resource people. In the case of links between health services and academics, projects highlighted the importance of clarifying issues such as intellectual property rights and publications up front.

Sustainability

Project officers agreed that they needed to be realistic about the funds and time required to achieve a project's objectives. It was easy to underestimate the time involved in tasks such as engaging stakeholders, paperwork, and so on.

It was pointed out that 'projects' are, by definition, short-term but may create longer-term expectations that they are unable to meet. There is a risk of disappointing sections of the community and creating cynicism among stakeholders, which may in turn affect later projects. A project's success may generate new opportunities or identify unmet needs, leading to a greater workload than anticipated. For example, a project which aims to improve community awareness of palliative care services is likely to increase demand for those services, which may not be equipped to meet this increased demand.

The need to identify alternative sources of funding was discussed. Projects may not continue as they are, but evolve into new forms, for example by generating information through consultation, which feeds back to change the project, or by building links with other services. In these cases, sustainability requires a flexible approach. Project officers need to be able to respond to changes in the funding environment and focus on finding ways to continue to achieve the outcomes of the

project rather than necessarily continuing the project itself.

Biggest problems

Professional support for project officers was the major issue raised. People employed to run a CCP project may be isolated geographically, in remote areas, or professionally, if there is a lack of support within their organisations. These problems could be overcome at least partly through professional supervision or mentoring.

What you thought of the workshop

Please note that a more detailed report on the workshop can be found at the following webpage:

<http://www.uow.edu.au/commerce/chsd/Publications/CCP%20Workshop%20Report%202004%20final.pdf>

Following the workshop, completed feedback forms were received from 35 project representatives of the 37 who attended (response rate 95%) and 12 representatives of government or other agencies of the 15 who attended (response rate 80%). The evaluation results are presented below.

Most (91%) of the participants thought the workshop was a 'good to very good use' of their time. The remainder felt it was somewhat useful. All but two comments were positive. Participants most frequently referred to:

- the benefits of networking, 'putting faces to names' and reducing the isolation of project officers (16)
- the opportunity to exchange ideas, get positive feedback and support, and seek advice/strategies for solving difficulties (14)

- the chance to hear about other projects (6)
- putting projects into a national perspective (6).

Participants were also invited to identify strengths and weaknesses of the workshop. They could name as many as they wished. The strengths largely reflected the comments made in the earlier question.

Many participants would have liked the opportunity to hear about more or all of the other projects (17). People were also critical of the accommodation and food (10), the venue for the workshop sessions, including the way the main room was set up (9). Others suggested ways to improve the workshop, such as: providing more information about project presentations, to help people choose which to attend; providing advance notice of the government and other representatives likely to attend; and setting aside time for government officers to meet.

Project officers were, in general, very confident about the evaluation process. Of the 35 project officers who provided feedback, 15 (43%) agreed and 14 (40%) strongly agreed with the statement, "My project will produce clear evaluation findings" (see Figure 6). This is an interesting contrast to the first workshop, at which just five project officers (21% of those present at the time) strongly agreed that they had a clear idea of how their projects could be evaluated.

Most participants (91%) thought a third workshop would be worthwhile. There was general consensus that around October 2005 would be the best time to hold the workshop.

Those who offered ideas for the content of the next workshop focused mainly on sustainability (13) and evaluation outcomes and feedback (11). An opportunity to debrief and exchange ideas (9) and guidance on writing the final reports (6) were also requested.

Thirty people made final comments on the feedback sheets. Most were positive, for example:

"Greatly appreciated. An opportunity to get away from the project but in a way that will contribute to it."

"Well done. Assistance and encouragement from the department at the conference was genuine and very useful."

"Great to be able to see, hear and meet these wonderful people."

"The workshop was fantastic, however I think it must be said that the facilities were very, very poor. Had I realised we were having a '70s theme for the dinner, I would have worn my kaftan!"

Several people offered ideas for the program or for the next workshop, such as:

"Develop a project officer register; include an exit management process in contracts; inform CCP projects of expectation of DHS involvement in CCP upfront."

"Would have liked to have seen a report writing workshop."

"Can we do posters next time?"

"Repetitive big picture. Would like to hear more about individual projects (positive

and negative). Information about more opportunities for funding in the future."

"Would be good to have more clarity regarding roles of State health departments at next workshop, especially regarding options of sustainability/ongoing funding."

New on the CCP website!

Would you like to know more about what other CCP projects are doing? If so, you're not alone. This was clear from the kinds of comments made at the national workshop, and from the feedback we received afterwards.

To facilitate information exchange and networking, we have expanded the CCP website and added new content. A recently updated one-page summary of most projects is now available, along with some of the PowerPoint presentations (converted to Adobe Acrobat files) given at the workshop. The address is:

http://www.uow.edu.au/commerce/chsd/ccp_summaries.html

If we recently contacted you about updating your project summary or providing a copy of your presentation, and you haven't yet had time to reply, it's not too late! Send your files to us by email to dfildes@uow.edu.au and we'll add them to the website.

