Reviewer’s report

Title: What core primary health care services should be available to Australians living in rural and remote communities?

Version: 3
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Reviewer: Sarah Larkins

Reviewer’s report:

Overall this is a well-written and conceptually clear manuscript on a topic of great relevance and interest in rural and remote health and primary health care policy. Overall, I would recommend that the manuscript should be accepted, but have a number of discretionary revisions to suggest.

1. The background sets the current policy stage and state of knowledge up very well, however I feel that the statement of aims for this particular manuscript could have been more clearly expressed. "The first stage is to ascertain exactly what PHC services are needed". I think this could be strengthened to include that they should be available to all Australians regardless of residence (and ideally specify within a "reasonable" distance/travel time from their home).

2. Delphi methodology has several limitations, however these are clearly outlined by the authors. I believe that the Delphi methodology used in this study are clearly outlined, and that this approach is really the only one available to answer the question at hand.

3. In terms of results, a wide range of respondents is included. I would also like to see some comment about the gender and geographical spread of participants (e.g. state) and a brief mention of the profile of all those invited. This could be included as an extra column early in Table 1 and would allow some assessment of participation bias.

4. In terms of method, a little more detail on the process of developing the list of core PHC services and necessary support functions from the same group's systematic review. This is a key piece of design, likely to have a major impact on the findings.

5. In terms of the discussion, I think more could be made of the particular relevance of the findings in light of current Australian funding cuts and policy reform. For example the strong consensus about the importance of public health/illness prevention whilst funding is being slashed from health promotion and prevention budgets and organisations.

6. I think the results could be useful in both national and state level planning and policy decisions, but also in small area geographically-based health service planning and redesign. Our group has done some similar work on a small scale in a demonstration project for Health Workforce Australia (https://www.hwa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Regional-Health-Workforce-Planning-in-NthQld_v3.pdf) and this agreement on an essential "basket-of-services" is a critical early step.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests