Reviewer's report

Title: Community participation in rural health: a scoping review

Version: 1 Date: 17 December 2012

Reviewer: Elizabeth Comino

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This paper presents a scoping review of the published literature designed to identify examples of rural health initiatives designed to include high levels of community participation.

Introduction/ background

The introduction outlines the background policy environment in relation to rural health care at Australian and international level.

Page 4, Para 3 – (major) this paragraph hints that communities once had greater control of their health care. This is an interesting idea as there have been shifts in expectations of ‘owners’ of health care provision where communities have handed responsibility over to others. This would be an interesting notion to explore further in relation to this paper.

Page 6 – this paragraph is very value laden with little justification of statements made. Words such as ‘major’ should be avoided.

Methods

(Major) I should like to see greater exploration of ‘Arnstein’s’ theory. In reading the paper and accompanying table 1 I was confused about whether consultation was included or excluded.

(Major) More detail about the search terms is required. The lack of Cochrane reviews is not surprising. Presumably the one found was excluded, although this is not currently clear? How systematically did the authors search in the ‘grey’ literature. This is likely to include quite a bit of relevant literature or was this not the case.

(Major) How many papers were identified through the searches? How was the initial scan undertaken? Was this based on the title, or abstract or what? More detail is required.

(Major) page 10 – outline of studies. It would be helpful if these numbers were more closely aligned to the flow chart in figure 2. The flow chart suggests that 11 articles were excused as ‘methods’ whereas the text page 10 para 3 suggest eight articles. Similarly in para 3 ‘24 articles demonstrated - - - ’ whereas in the flow chart there were 28. were the Six articles (page 10, para 3, line 7 the articles that were included in the final analysis or is this a coincidence. Figure 2 requires further detail and the text needs to be clarified.

(Major) Table 3 provides a summary of the research methods used. I was looking
for a description of the interventions that were being studied. The paper would be stronger for including a description of the projects included in the review – what were they? What was the level of community participation? How was this monitored? Etc.

Results/ discussion

(Major) The results discussion section largely focuses on the issues that arose for each project and is very general. For example, ‘decision making was democratic’ – how did this play out? What happened when the needs of the funder were different to those of the community?

Para 1, line 8 – is the paper interested in the ‘project’ or the research? There seems to be some confusion.

(Major) Given that the aim of the paper was to ‘identify examples, in the international literature, of higher level community participation in rural healthcare’ the authors might like to revisit this aim. The major flaw in the paper is that the authors have not clearly described what these examples are. It is impossible to establish the relative importance of the issues that are discussed in the discussion, or to identify how different models of community engagement played out.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests