Reviewer's report

Title: Collaborating with consumer and community representatives in health and medical research in Australia: results from an evaluation

Version: 1 Date: 8 February 2011

Reviewer: Carla Saunders

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Major Compulsory Revisions

Background

It is important that early in background a statement on the evidence base and/or rationale for consumer involvement in health research is provided to place the current work within a more robust context.

Some clarification needs to be made about the requirement of the NHMRC for research applicants to describe community/consumer participation i.e. does this ultimately influence funding decisions under a scientific merit review process? How much weight is given to consumer involvement?

NHMRC requirements are stated to be the primary driver of consumer involvement in this project and that it was also anticipated that the participation would add value, does this mean that this is the first time consumers have been involved in the research of this group? If so please state and briefly describe past successes / challenges with consumer involvement in your research. If not please indicate whether there was any initial investigation of consumer involvement to inform the approach described in this paper.

The background states an evaluation was conducted on the impact of CCP – this should be changed to read researcher and consumer perceived impact of CCP

What is the research question?

Methods

The first sentence in the methods section which describes The alcohol and pregnancy project needs to be placed in the Background section.

There are currently insufficient details provided to replicate this work. It is stated that advice was obtained with regard to setting up the 2 reference groups – this advice needs to be further clarified. Similarly the reason for omitting the word consumer needs to be explained.

Some of the governance and information tools such as the TOR/Project Summary etc should be provided as appendix to this paper to support replication and guidance for other researchers.

Evaluations of CCP have been undertaken - see:

1. Jo Brett, Sophie Staniszewska, Carole Mockford, Kate Seers, Sandy
Herron-Marx and Helen Bayliss. The PIRICOM Study: A systematic review of the conceptualisation, measurement, impact and outcomes of patients and public involvement in health and social care research. United Kingdom Clinical Research Collaboration. August 2010


More information needs to be provided on the development of the questionnaire used to assess the process, context and impact of involvement i.e. was there any validation process such as piloting and refining etc? The open ended questions need to be provided in Table 1. Results should also be provided i.e. rates of responses etc

Telford principles need to be briefly described for the benefit of readers.

Results

The results need to include examples of tangible input/advice from consumers that led to positive changes. Rather than just describing researchers opinions about working with consumers generally, the actual input that led to improvements in research design / tools / approaches etc is needed for this paper to add to the existing evidence base otherwise it is simply describing a general view rather than the value that involving consumers added. Tangible example/s under each heading of input from consumers that led to change and would not have been available without consumer involvement is required. A table highlighting the actual contributions of consumers would be useful to demonstrate the merit and importance of involvement.

Discussion

This paper needs to focus more on the ‘so what’ that is above and beyond that of satisfying a funding application requirement.

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 declare that I have no competing interests.