Reviewers report

Title: Rural definition of health: A literature review

Version: 2  Date: 28 January 2015

Reviewer: Rebecca Evans

Reviewers report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this research article on an interesting aspect of rural health. The research question regarding definition/s of health amongst rural populations and potential differences in definitions between rural and urban populations is a useful one. The authors appropriately place the research question in the contemporary context of health care systems endeavouring to improve patient centered care and patient activation.

The preliminary material (title, abstract etc.) is an appropriate reflection of the article content. The authors research question is clear and justification for this question is described well in the introduction. The methods appear appropriate and well-described, supplemented by the PRISMA checklist which is an appropriate guide for reporting on systematic reviews. The writing standard is certainly appropriate for this publication.

A major limitation of the findings is the lack of comparison found in the literature between rural and urban groups – constraining the potential to make sound conclusions about any potential differences between the groups or to suggest a RDoH that might integrate all findings. Nonetheless, the findings are informative, bringing together international literature in this area in a systematic fashion. I hope that the below points might be of benefit in further refining this article for publication.

Minor essential revisions:
- It is unclear from the article or supplementary material why the authors have not conducted an assessment of risk of bias amongst the included studies/articles. Although the PRISMA checklist might focus more on quantitative research articles, authors should still be able to make comment about risk of bias that may be present in qualitative or mixed methods studies. If this assessment was done, some indication of findings in this regard should be included. If such assessment was not completed, the authors should make comment as to why not.
- Appendix A – please review percentage figures provided on page 3, first paragraph.
- The authors appear to mention (around lines 208-210) that there are methodological limitations inherent in the research that contain rural and urban comparison groups. It is unclear what these are and some further elaboration on this would be helpful.
Discretionary revisions:

- For clarity, in the results section, authors could add around line 151 that remaining articles (i.e. of the 125 identified articles) were not included as they did not contain rural definitions of health.

- Unsure whether the study purpose (line 100 and following) is an accurate reflection of the systematic review. This could presently be interpreted as assessing the literature regarding definitions of health in rural and urban groups (essentially comparing two different areas of literature) whereas this systematic review appeared to be concerned with assessing the literature around RDoHs primarily and then also noting any differences between rural and urban populations where possible.

- It would be interesting to note the evidence gradings (according to the ADA, as suggested by authors) for each of the 34 studies – a column with this information could be included in Table 1.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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.