

Building partnerships for health promotion

A four-year Australian Research Council linkage project which partnered health promotion professionals in Logan and Beaudesert is assisting health promotion programs adjust to new government priorities.

Griffith Health Institute researcher, Letitia Del Fabbro from the Population and Social Health program has been conducting her PhD research in partnership with health promotion groups in Logan/Beaudesert in the hope her work will improve the capacities of the participants in their different areas.

"It's a different approach as the University is bringing something to the table. Instead of just watching and studying and asking questions, it's participatory. We learn how they work and the University provides an evidence base to their work," said Ms Del Fabbro.

"The research is translational in that we build skills which transform practice, which we research and support further. There is a constant transfer and evolution of knowledge and practice.

"Health promotion is strengthened by its growing evidence base and in this place-based research we can construct the process together, with the potential for some really positive and unique results"

Many of the programs are adjusting to new government priorities. For people working in programs trying to make long-term change, these times can be a challenge to negotiate as new priorities and targets demand organisational adjustment.

"People are very passionate about what they do and know they achieve good outcomes. But they also know it's a long-term deal, certainly longer than election cycles. It takes time to turn around intergenerational determinants of health, so this kind of adjustment is always going to happen."

This is one of the functional roles of interactive research like this is that Griffith has the capacity to provide possible options for these services to think about and then research how these adjustments played out.



Community navigators



Photo: Associate Professor Saras Henderson

Research has long found that migrant communities find our health systems confusing, meaning they often don't access services specifically designed for them.

Associate Professor Saras Henderson from Griffith Health Institute's Population and Social Health program thought she could do something about this. In conjunction with colleagues and two Logan-based migrant service linking groups, Multilink Community Services Inc. and Access Services Inc.

The idea was *community navigators*, people with the language and cultural skills to guide people toward and through the community medical system and access services before their illnesses became an emergency.

"We basically trained up knowledge brokers, nominated by the communities themselves and given a wage. They could do basic translation work, but more importantly explain how the health system worked in a way that was meaningful to the communities," said Associate Professor Henderson.

"We trialled four communities with nine navigators - three Pacific Islanders, two Sudanese, two Karen (Burma) and two

Afghans - working 11 hours a week and reporting to Multilink. After 18 months we explored the navigators' 'lived experience' of their role. We were surprised by the results."

Not only were the health services seeing a rise in people from these communities accessing their clinics, but the navigators were being run off their feet, to the point of burn out. Despite the pressure their roles involved they were honoured to have the positions.

"The navigators service became totally focussed around the social determinants of health, but at the same time doctors (GPs) were calling them and asking them to translate and the communities were viewing them as a genuine service. It put them in some very difficult positions," she said

"So in a way the navigator model was quite successful even though the role was taxing on the navigators themselves."

The pilot program ended in 2011 and Associate Professor Henderson is exploring how the model can be broadened and applied differently so there is less pressure on the navigators.

In the meantime the navigators continue to do their jobs for free.