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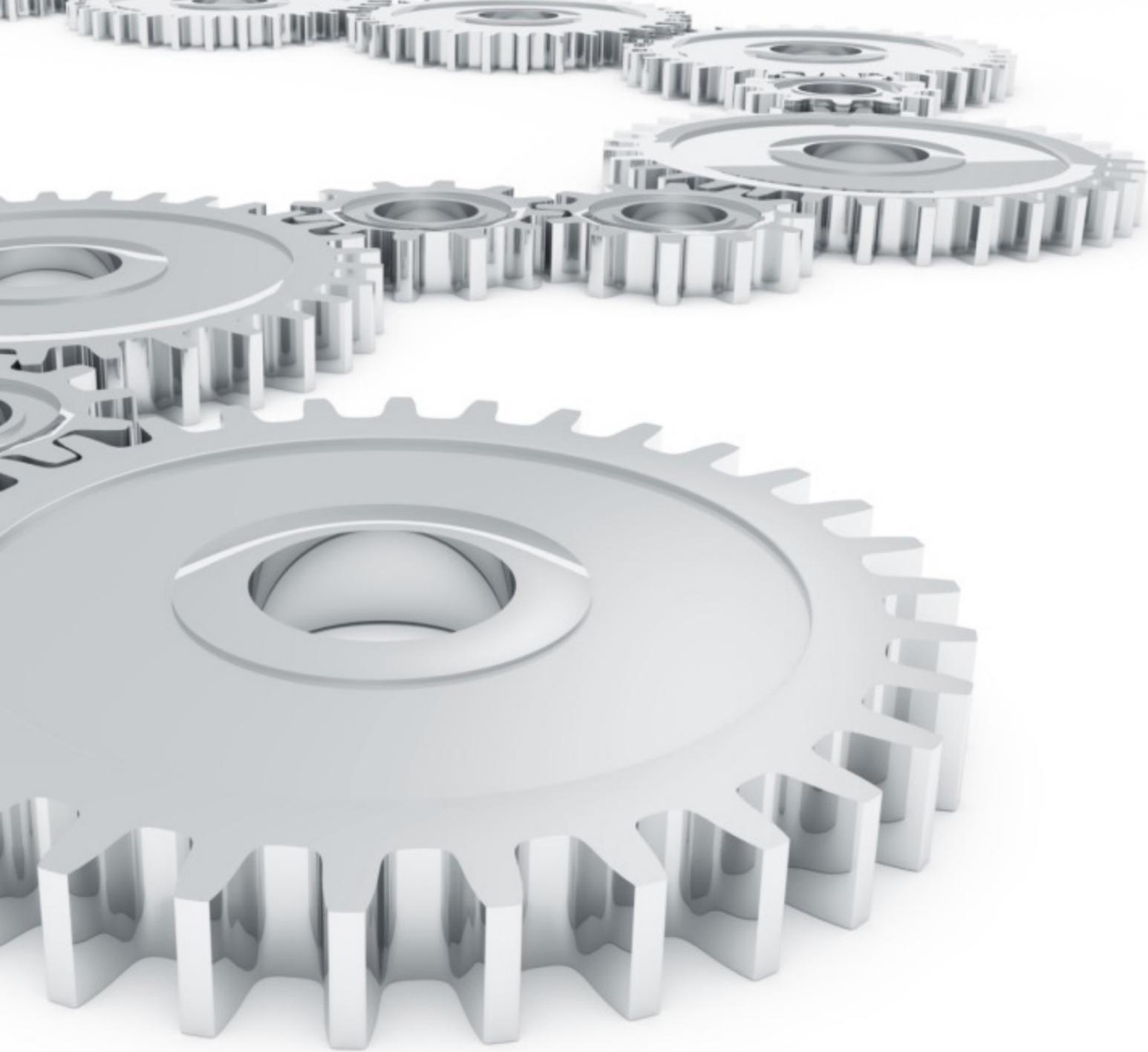


AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
INTERNATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
RESEARCH NETWORK IN PRIMARY CARE

ANU College of
Medicine, Biology
& Environment

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Implementation research, as it applies specifically to health, is a type of health policy and systems research concerned with the study of clinical and public health policies, programs and practices, with the basic intent being to understand not only what is and isn't working, but how and why implementation is going right or wrong, and to test approaches to improve implementation.

- (Peters DH et al, WHO 2013 p27)

PURPOSE



This paper outlines the importance of Implementation Research in primary health care and the context in which it operates. The first section gives background to the vital role of implementation research in developing and supporting health care delivery, systems and services, and the importance of closely linking implementation research to primary health care to achieve this. The second section outlines the background, purpose and role of the IIRNPC and to discuss network activities in 2014.

Background

In 2011, the Commonwealth Fund, US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) funded an international collaboration titled, International Learning on Increasing the Value and Effectiveness of Primary Care (I LIVE PC) (special issue JABFM April 2012). The collaboration concluded that a solid foundation of primary care is an essential ingredient for effective, efficient and equitable delivery of health care.

Health systems in most developed nations, other than the United States, have long recognised this and supported robust primary care capacity. Several countries have undertaken major health system transformations in the past decade, often including experiments with primary care to try to improve their outcomes. These system transformations hold lessons for other countries to share. Examples include the United Kingdom and The Netherlands which are reducing primary care patient panel size and moving more to group practice models. Australia recently created primary health care organisations with geographies of accountability, borrowing from the United Kingdom and Denmark and is also creating “superclinics” with broader primary health care team capacities. The Dutch are receiving new payments to support chronic care management through practice consortia.

The success of this initiative resulted in a follow-up meeting during the International Health Care Reform Conference in Brisbane, Australia in March 2012 when the International Implementation Research Network in Primary

Care (IIRNPC) was established jointly by APHCRI and the APHCRI Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Primary Health Care Microsystems (University of Queensland). The purpose of forming the IIRNPC is to create a learning collaborative focused on shared lessons and the science of practice and health system transformation. Following the Brisbane conference, an initial program of IIRNPC activity commenced with the CRE creating a basic infrastructure to support the IIRNPC including mailing lists, website, e-newsletter, forums and a repository of publications and resources. APHCRI has since been establishing contacts, particularly in Asia, to extend the IIRNPC. In 2013, a follow-up to the Brisbane meeting was organised in Ottawa to refine the aims and objectives of the IIRNPC and to identify areas of work that could be undertaken in 2014.



Implementation research and its role



"Implementation research is the scientific enquiry into questions concerning implementation - the act of carrying an intention into effect, which in health research can be policies, programmes, or individual practices (collectively called interventions)." (Peters DH et al, BMJ 2013). One of the most critical issues impeding improvements in health today is the enormous inconsistency between those interventions which we know can optimise population health and health care delivery and those which are actually implemented in everyday practice (Green et al 2009). Further, it is well documented that only a fraction of primary care research is translated to policy

and practice (Woolf 2008, Green et al 2009). Implementation research seeks to address this gap by using scientific methodologies that support the movement of evidence-based research into policy and practice in order to benefit individuals and society (Brownson et al 2012, Rubenstein and Pugh 2006).

No single set of methods define implementation research however there are approaches to research that are more suited to a focus on implementation and which support the critical principles of relevancy and engagement with stakeholders.

Multiple stakeholders are involved in the development and implementation of new approaches to health care including: patients/users of health care, community leaders, policymakers, primary health care professionals, scientists and experts in the field of implementation science. These stakeholders each represent vital, unique expertise in the design process and application of innovations in health care. Their interaction will ultimately determine the success of health care reform/improvement.

"Primary health care is socially appropriate, universally accessible, scientifically sound first level care provided by health services and systems with a suitably trained workforce comprised of multi-disciplinary teams supported by integrated referral systems in a way that: gives priority to those most in need and addresses health inequalities; maximises community and individual self-reliance, participation and control; and involves collaboration and partnership with other sectors to promote public health."

- WHO Alma Ata on Primary Health Care



‘Research on implementation requires the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders and draws on multiple disciplines in order to address complex implementation challenges... at its best, implementation research is often a collective and collaborative endeavour. It is therefore essential that all stakeholders understand the importance of collaboration in the implementation of the research endeavour.’

- Peters. D. H. et al, WHO 2013 p5



Implementation research and primary health care: an important, interdependent relationship

Primary health care has been identified as a critical function in the health care system, for effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of population health (Starfield B et al 2005). Better primary health care is related to better population health at lower health care costs.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers primary health care to be the pivotal factor in the design and implementation of robust health care systems and has ‘strongly reaffirmed the values and principles of primary health care, including equity, solidarity, social justice, universal access to services, multisectoral action, decentralization and community participation as the basis for strengthening health systems’ (WHO 2009). In addition, through its functions, primary health care can have an impact beyond health on the resilience and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

The implementation research approach is consistent with the values of primary health care and is able to reflect the widely different social and environmental context of individuals and communities in all parts of the world. Coordinating this focus on implementation and strengthening the impact of research is an innovative approach to health care improvement and reform.

Benefits of an IIRNPC

The benefits of an IIRNPC, focussed on promoting implementation in primary health care research and supporting national multi-stakeholder forums through international collaboration, will make research more central and relevant to primary health care policy and service delivery. The focus may also help with translating learning from one country to others and develop a research community capable of studying and improving this process.

Given the alignment of the intent of the IIRNPC with APHCRI's role, it was agreed that APHCRI will be the strategic lead for the IIRNPC with the CRE in Primary Health Care Microsystems (University of Queensland) providing operational support to the IIRNPC.

The draft purpose, objectives and work program for the IIRNPC are presented below for discussion.

Role of the IIRNPC

The IIRNPC is an international collaboration of primary health care researchers and stakeholders with a shared vision of advancing the field of implementation research and its specific application to bridging the gap between primary care research, policy, and practice in order to speed translation and transformation of care.

Purpose of the Network

The IIRNPC's overall purpose is to create an international learning collaborative to enable primary health care to effectively fulfil its central functions in equitable and sustainable health systems through the sharing of research that informs policy and service development and improves the quality of health care.

Objectives

The Network has six specific objectives to:

- 1.Support and promote the conduct of high quality implementation research in primary health care and disseminate findings
- 2.Demonstrate the value and appropriateness of implementation research to the development of primary health care policy and services
- 3.Develop the skills and expertise of primary health care researchers and stakeholders in implementation research
- 4.Promote the value of implementation research methods in the assessment criteria for primary health care research funding
- 5.Provide opportunities for international collaboration to share learning, identify mutual priorities, test translation of innovation, and implement evidence-based primary health care services.
- 6.Develop international collaborations to translate research findings into evidence useful to policymakers and service providers.

Membership of the IIRNPC

Membership of the IIRNPC is open to groups and individuals who share this vision. IIRNPC members are likely to play an active role on a national or international level in the implementation of primary health care research. They are also likely to be involved in national multi-stakeholder collaborations to promote, support and develop implementation research in primary health care policy and service delivery. It is envisaged that members will contribute to IIRNPC activities, including sharing of their work with a national and international audience.

Membership is free of charge. Members are responsible for any costs of their participation in IIRNPC activities, unless specific funding has been secured through the IIRNPC.

Country contacts for the IIRNPC are available on the **APHCRI website**.

Initially a basic infrastructure to support the IIRNPC's work will be established. Some of this work has already commenced and will include developing and maintaining IIRNPC communication modes including website, mailing list and forum and identifying international networks and organisations representing the interests of policymakers, consumers and primary health care service providers.

Communication and enlisting of members will continue through existing networks of contacts and promotion at various conferences scheduled for 2014. In some cases these will provide venues for face-to-face meetings of IIRNPC members.

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The Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) plays a key role in Australia's primary health care system through leading, funding and otherwise supporting priority-driven research into primary health care. APHCRI has three main objectives to:

1. Support priority-driven primary health care research
2. Increase the capacity to undertake primary health care research
3. Drive the implementation of research into primary health care policy and practice.

IIRNPC network activities 2014

Communications and networks

- Promote and establish communication methods and modes
- Example: regional WONCA conference, Malaysia 2014 to engage national networks of PHC stakeholders
- Example: develop IIRNPC website functions
- Example: establish annual network forum meeting (eg NAPCRG New York, USA, November 2014)

Developing skills and experience of researchers

- Establish mechanisms for developing PHC researcher skills in implementation including an understanding of PHC provider and policy environments
- Example: developing international exchange programs focused on implementation between academic institutions (eg Radboud University Nijmegen, Robert Graham, ICIS, joint Australian & NZ/Canadian Research CREs)
- Example: conduct workshops to develop researcher skills in implementation Research such as in Brisbane, March 2014 and consumer engagement training program for researchers being conducted in Australia in 2014

Building mechanisms for stakeholder collaboration

- Promoting and supporting national collaborative networks of PHC researchers and stakeholders by facilitating sharing of international experience about evidence-based PHC development
- Example: support development of individual country platforms for collaboration as requested
- Example: program of visiting experts eg APHCRI Visits [Australian visiting experts program] and USA's Washington embassies program

Conferences in 2014

Rocking the Boat: 2nd International Primary Health Care Reform Conference

March 2014, Brisbane, Australia

> Workshop for researchers; developing implementation research skills, linking to policy makers and service providers

Primary Health Care Research Conference

July 2014, Canberra, Australia

> Promoting IR methods and funding opportunities
> Engaging multi discipline stakeholders to collectively establish an international implementation research CRE

North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG) Annual Conference

November 2014, New York, USA

> Annual Forum of the Network
> Multi discipline stakeholder engagement, including consumer voices

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