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Grampians student accommodation project

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Background and context

The aim of this project was to provide student accommodation and resources at nine rural clinical placement providers to increase the capacity and quality of clinical placements across all health professions in the Grampians Region.

Limited access to safe and affordable student accommodation has been a significant barrier to health care students undertaking clinical placement in rural health services. Evidence of this exists in clinical placement scoping projects previously undertaken on behalf of the Department of Human Services.

The cost of accommodation is frequently prohibitive for students who also have added petrol/transport expenses, food expenses and loss of income from their usual paid employment whilst they undertake clinical education away from their home location. Driving long distances in rural areas presents unacceptable risk associated with fatigue, wildlife and the potential for natural disasters such as bushfires and flooding. In addition, poor coverage by mobile phone communication networks in some rural areas provide an added risk in situations where students do not have access to reliable transport or experience mechanical failure.

The Grampians Clinical Placement Network (CPN) has identified that affordable, accessible, safe student accommodation is of high-strategic priority in the region. According to viCProfile data, nineteen organisations (or fifty-nine facilities) within the Grampians Region offer clinical placements for professional-entry health care students, yet only eight organisations (seventeen facilities) provide accommodation. (East Wimmera Health Service was included in this data, however St Arnaud is the only facility from this organisation that lies within the Grampians Region boundary). Whilst provided, student accommodation may not be safe, usable in extreme weather conditions, or provide the necessary resources and IT infrastructure that students in 2012 require whilst on a clinical placement. According to available data on viCProfile from 2010, more than 50% of organisations offering clinical placement did not have access to education provider portals for students.

Of the eight organisations that stated they provided student accommodation in 2010, six of those successfully applied for funding in 2011 (Darcy Associates Consulting Services, 2010, DH, 2011). Of the six sites funded, five have buildings and improvements still in progress, with some requiring additional funds for the fit-out of accommodation, further capital works to increase the amount of accommodation places offered, IT infrastructure and student study resources. Following subsequent consultation with clinical placement providers in the region in 2012, additional sites for accommodation and student resource improvement have been identified in the aim of increasing capacity and quality of clinical placements. These sites include Ballan District Health and Care, Ballarat Day Procedure Centre, Ballarat Health Services, Beaufort & Skipton Health Service, Dunmunkle Health Service, East Grampians Health Service, East Wimmera Health Service, Grampians Medicare Local and Wimmera Health Care Group.

Allied health accommodation in the Ballarat area has been identified by the Grampians and Loddon Mallee CPNs as an area of priority. Ballarat Health Services advises that in 2011, fifty-nine allied health students participated in clinical placement, however forty-seven of those students were from outside of Ballarat. Of the forty-seven students, thirty-four had to source their own accommodation (72%). La Trobe Bendigo provides allied health students to the Grampians Region for placement and they have also indicated that sourcing appropriate and affordable accommodation for these students is difficult and can prevent students from participating in placements in Ballarat and the region. ViCProfile data lists only ten organisations that provided allied health clinical placements in 2010 and only four organisations (40%) have accommodation available. The accommodation that is available to allied health students is offered outside the Ballarat area in Stawell, Ararat, Warracknabeal, Minyip and Murtoa where allied health clinical placement activity is much less than that of Ballarat Health Services.

Significant funding has been provided for nursing student accommodation through the Grampians Clinical Training Project and for medical student accommodation through other funding sources. Allied health students do not have access to dedicated accommodation currently and are a workforce resource that needs to be attracted to the Grampians Region.

Capital works to improve existing structures and complete works funded in the previous accommodation proposal such as accommodation fit-outs, kitchen and bathroom renovations, installation of security systems and additional student needs, such as desks, chairs, bedroom furniture and IT infrastructure will also be required in the next twelve months to enable expanded settings such as small rural and community health care settings to host health care students on clinical placement and meet the goals of the Expanded Settings for Clinical Placement Program funding, ‘Grampians Integrated Clinical Learning Project – Stage 3’. The provision of additional resources and accommodation will assist the region to implement the Best Practice Clinical Learning Environment (BPCLE) Framework for small rural clinical placement providers and therefore increase the quality of clinical placements in the Grampians Region.

Project objectives and expected impacts

* To provide additional safe and well appointed student accommodation to students of all health care disciplines, which allows for an increase in clinical placement capacity in the Grampians Region;
* To provide an increase in dedicated allied health student accommodation;

To promote high-quality clinical placement by providing teaching and learning equipment and infrastructure to organisations.

The quality of health care student clinical placements in the Grampians Region will be improved in the following way:

* To provide allied health student accommodation by at least five beds in the Grampians Region;
* To provide IT infrastructure and/or equipment to a minimum of ten health care facilities;

To provide improved student accommodation for use by all health care disciplines across the Grampians Region, particularly in rural or remote organisations.

Increased capacity of clinical placements in the Grampians CPN will be achieved as follows:

* Increased numbers of healthcare students across the organisations receiving accommodation upgrades. Estimates are:
* Increase of 30% of students in each listed organisation 2013 (note that accommodation renovations may take months to complete therefore leaving a limited timeframe in 2012 to increase student numbers).

Provide accommodation which can be utilised by students who are placed in several organisations and disciplines in one region i.e. East Grampians Health Service allowing organisations without onsite accommodation to accept students.

Project management

Grampians CPN Committee will provide governance; monitoring of the progress of the activities across the various sites will be undertaken by the CPN Coordinator. Purchasing, works and installation of resources will be managed by a nominated staff member at each participating organisation.

The lead agency, Wimmera Health Care Group, will be responsible for all contractual requirements and reporting. They will directly report progress of this project at each scheduled meeting.

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| Cost item | Budgeted expenditure | | Actual expenditure (to date) | |
| Ballan District Health Care | $38 500 | | $38 500 | |
| Ballarat Day Procedure Centre | $2 000 | | $2 000 | |
| Ballarat Health Services | $59 650 | | $59 000 | |
| Beaufort & Skipton Health Service | $98 692 | | $98 692 | |
| Dunmunkle Health Service | $65 680 | | $65 680 | |
| East Grampians Health Service | $45 000 | | $45 000 | |
| East Wimmera Health Service | $ 152 672 | | $152 672 | |
| Grampians Medicare Local | $107 020 | | $107 020 | |
| Wimmera Health Care Group | $170 786 | | $170 786 | |
|  | TOTAL (budgeted): | $740 000 | TOTAL (actual): | $740 000 |

Project performance against stated deliverables

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| Project activity | Project deliverable/target | Due date | Status |
| Ballan District Health and Care | Renovation of three-bed accommodation | March 2013 | Completed March 2013 |
| Ballarat Day Procedure Centre | Student lockers and laptop computer | September 2012 | Purchases completed and installed September 2012 |
| Ballarat Health Services | Refurbishment of six-bed accommodation for allied health students | 1 June 2013 | Completed January 2013 |
| Beaufort & Skipton Health Service | Refurbish Skipton student accommodation | 1 June 2013 | Completed March 2013. |
| Dunmunkle Health Service | Renovation of three-bed accommodation | 1 June 2013 | Completed June 2013 |
| East Grampians Health Service | Extend Student accommodation by four beds | 1 June 2013 | Completed April 2013 |
| East Wimmera Health Service | Fit-out of student accommodation at St Arnaud campus and building cost shortfall from previous funding round | 1 June 2013 | Completed February 2013 |
| Grampians Medicare Local | Eight trolley-based videoconferencing units in General Practices throughout the region | 1 March 2013 | Completed January 2013 |
| Wimmera Health Care Group | * Refurbishment of 4 Read Street * FF&E 3 Arnott Street * Refurbishment Home 4 | * 1 June 2013 * 1 June 2013 * 1 June 2013 | * Completed March 2013 * Completed March 2013 * Completed March 2013 |

Project outcomes

All capital works and equipment purchases for the project activities were completed within the timeframes given and within allocated budgets.

The project contributed to the establishment and refurbishment of forty-nine student accommodation beds at seven health facilities across the Grampians Region. Wi-Fi and IT infrastructure to allow students access to university portals were included in the accommodation projects. Videoconferencing equipment has been installed in sixteen medical centres across the region.

There are now ten beds available in Grampians Region (six in Ballarat and four in Horsham) that provide priority accommodation for allied health students.

Official data on student placements will not be available for 2013 until the end of the academic year, however estimates indicate that student numbers have significantly increased in all health services in the region and growth in available placements continues.

Evaluation

The Rural Accommodation and Infrastructure Program provided significant improvements in affordable student accommodation and IT infrastructure for education at a number of our health services, effectively removing two major barriers to increasing clinical placement opportunities for students in the Grampians Region.

Collaboration and cooperation between health services involved in the project has been outstanding and governance provided by Grampians CPN has been exceptional. The management of eight large capital projects across a region covering approximately 100 000 square kilometres has been a monumental feat.

Timeframes and budgets have been adhered to, thanks to open communication channels between the health services and the CPN.

In order to make most efficient use of money the lead agency undertook management of funds and oversight of progress and reporting of the project activities free of charge. While this contributed to the overall success of what was a major capital project, it has placed considerable administrative burden on the lead agency and the executive sponsor. Therefore it is worth considering for future projects, a small administration budget to assist in providing day-to-day administrative services.

Conclusion

The Grampians Rural Accommodation and Infrastructure project has achieved all of its objectives on time and within budget. The outcome is better facilities for students undergoing clinical placement in health services across the Grampians Region which will in turn increase the clinical placement opportunities for our health care students.