

Community Participation in Health Planning in Australia

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Abstract : Rural ECOH (Engaging Communities in Oral Health) is a collaborative project that connects policy makers, service providers and community members. The aim of the project is to empower community members to determine what is important for their community and to design the services that they need. This three-year project is currently underway in six rural communities across Australia. This study is specifically focused on Remote Services Futures (RSF), an evidence-based method of community participation that was developed in Scotland. The findings highlight the complexities of community participation in health service planning. We assumed that people living in rural communities would welcome participation in oral health planning and engage with their community to discuss these issues. We found that to understand the relationships between community members and health service providers, it was essential to identify the formal and informal community leaders and to engage stakeholders from the various community governance structures. Our study highlights the sometimes 'messiness' of decision making in rural communities as well as ways to ensure that community members have the training and practical skills necessary to participate in community decision making.

Keywords : community participation, health planning, rural ECOH, Remote Services Futures

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