

# Key research support staff and location influences the research capacity and culture of the Victorian public health allied health workforce.

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## Background

Previous research identified allied health clinicians as having early phase research activity skills (finding and critiquing literature). Limited strategies have been identified to increase skill in the later phases of research (data analysis, writing for publication and mentoring in research). This research aimed to explore the extrinsic factors of self-reported research capacity and culture of the Victorian public health allied health workforce.

## Methods

A cross-sectional survey was undertaken with subsequent semi-structured interviews. The Research Capacity and Culture tool was disseminated to all Victorian public health allied health departments. Demographic data were also collected, including the presence of an organisational allied health research lead. A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit participants for the interview to ensure a mix of respondents from junior to senior allied health staff and from a mix of disciplines and locations.

## Results

All allied health disciplines and all grades were represented in returned surveys (n=529). An organisational allied health research lead was present for 35% (n=186) responses and 82% (n=432) were located in a metropolitan-based health service. Significant differences within all organisational and team research skills between those with and without a research lead and between different locations ( $p < 0.05$ ) were found. Higher self-ratings in individual research skills ( $p < 0.05$ ) were primarily associated with more senior and metropolitan-located clinicians. Three themes were identified: 1: it's not clinical work AND research, it's clinical work OR research, 2: The challenge of using evidence to guide practice and 3: The difference between organisations saying they support research, and actually supporting research

## Discussion

A whole systems approach is required to build and implement evidence to support practice. The results of the present study suggest that the development of key people to build capacity at a higher organisational level has a flow-down effect on research capacity and culture.