

A blueprint for equity – the Western NSW Local Health District allied health resource

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Background

The health status of many communities within Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD) is low; however distribution of the Allied Health resource in western NSW has traditionally been based on historical precedent rather than objective identification of need.

In 2013, a collaboration between WNSWLHD and Western NSW Medicare Local provided a detailed picture of the health needs of communities within the District. Subsequently, development of a strategic plan identified priority areas for WNSWLHD and provided a favourable environment for a comprehensive review of the distribution of the Allied Health resource. This led to the development of a mathematical algorithm to quantify the relative health needs of communities within WNSWLHD, thus informing equitable distribution and service provision for Allied Health across the District.

Variables included in the algorithm were:

- Age
- Remoteness
- Low English Proficiency
- Socio-Economic Disadvantage
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Background

Method

Following development, trial and external validation of the algorithm by two tertiary education institutions, implementation of review processes commenced.

Clinician led working parties enabled “bottom up” planning involving Allied Health clinicians in each review process. These working parties were tasked with application of the algorithm to their discipline and development of a review report articulating strategies and recommendations pertinent to their discipline; incorporating realignment of staffing to relative need, exploration of partnerships with external agencies involving innovative cross agency models of care, and enhanced use of telehealth in the delivery of services.

Progression of each discipline review report through a two staged consultation process enabled stakeholders to contribute to each review process.

Results

Implementation of review recommendations is now occurring with movement of staffing toward under-resourced communities, resulting in enhanced equity across WNSWLHD.

Discussion

This framework quantifies the relative need of communities within WNSWLHD and strengthens consistent evidence based decision making pertaining to resource allocation.

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