Facilitating health research impact through infrastructure funding:

The PHHSRS Program

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Background

Population Health and Health Services Research Support (PHHSRS) Program:

- Competitive funding scheme for NSW population health and health services research organisations
- Funds infrastructure and capacity building strategies to:
  - Increase high quality research in NSW
  - Support research that addresses NSW Health priorities
  - Encourage adoption of research findings in health policies, programs and services in NSW
Objectives

Independent review of PHHSRS Program to:

- Determine the extent to which PHHSRS is achieving its objectives
- Identify potential future directions for PHHSRS to optimise:
  - Generation of high quality research
  - Adoption of research in health policies, programs and services
Methods

- Review and analysis of PHHSRS documents including recipients’ annual progress reports
- Interviews with stakeholders, including:
  - Researchers from all 7 organisations currently in receipt of PHHSRS funding
  - Representatives from relevant policy/service branches of NSW Health (n=6)
Objective 1: Increase high quality research in NSW

Peer reviewed grant income (total $A)
Objective 1: Increase high quality research in NSW

Peer reviewed journal publications (total)
Objective 1: Increase high quality research in NSW

Perceived benefits of PHHSRS

- Core infrastructure
  - "We don’t have a core funded statistician on any other research program" – Recipient
  - "Funding has provided infrastructure as the ‘glue’ to build research groups integrated into health care” – Recipient

- Collaboration
  - "It has enabled us to form collaborations … we have been able to have people visit, to hold workshops and seminars when they visit” – Recipient

- Stability and continuity
  - "Researchers scatter to the wind if you have a lean year with low funds [and] tend not to return when you do have funds the next year” – Recipient
  - "The question is: Could the organisations do the work without [PHHSRS] money? Probably. But does this money facilitate them doing great work? Absolutely.” – Policymaker
Objective 2: Support research that addresses NSW Health priorities

Enabling policy-relevant research

- NSW Health representation on research committees (7/7 recipients)
- Regular meetings and discussions with NSW Health staff to inform research agendas (6/7 recipients)
- Consultation and forums with LHD staff to keep abreast of local issues and support translation (5/7 recipients)

BUT

- Can sometimes be difficult to develop and maintain relationships with Ministry and Pillars

“An important criteria for us to select research directions ... is alignment with [NSW Health] priorities” – Recipient

“PHHSRS funds allow us time to respond to requests [for advice] as we are freed from grant preparation. [The funds] also increase the sense that we have a responsibility to respond to these requests” – Recipient

“At the moment we have partners with a lot of goodwill who know a lot about the content area, but we have repeated meetings, throw a line out, things get lost” – Recipient
Objective 3: Encourage adoption of research findings in health policies, programs and services in NSW

Research translations

Health service/practice/program translations including:
- Disease surveillance, identification, management
- Models of care and clinical decision rules
- Early childhood home visiting

Policy translations including:
- NSW breastfeeding policy
- Housing NSW policy
- Mass vaccinations in severe pandemics

“We undertook research to improve monitoring and surveillance. As a result of this the NSW Government has announced additional funding” – Recipient

“Recipient X is inextricably involved in the policy direction that NSW Health took and the research to inform that guiding change” – Policymaker
Objective 3: Encourage adoption of research findings in health policies, programs and services in NSW

Facilitators of research translation

- Strong, longstanding relationship with a policy partner
- ‘Embedded’ research model that enables deep relationships with service partners:
  - Research hubs established within LHDs
  - Research implementation officer jointly recruited by and co-located with policy agency

“PHHSRS has enabled us to engage [with NSW Health staff] more directly and allows us to be seen as associated with NSW Health, which helps to ensure we’re not seen as ‘different’ – our remit is to work with them” – Recipient

“They are using data and processes they are generating to change clinical practice at the local hospitals. They are also advocating for use of this more broadly” – Policymaker
Other benefits of PHHSRS

- Leveraging additional grant funding
- Capacity building of health system staff
- Career progression
- Networks

“[PHHSRS] nudges you to better governance and planning – we integrate our programs under an umbrella. [It gives] you scope to do strategic thinking” – Recipient

“Probably the biggest capacity build is in the service providers we partner with … we deliver research for the system and are a resource for others in the system” – Recipient
Challenges

- Attributing outcomes to PHHSRS funds (versus other sources)
- Strengthening research/policy partnerships
- Describing and assessing translation