

Summary of the 2016 Western Cape Provincial Health Research Committee (PHRC) Strategic Planning Workshop

Introduction

The incoming Western Cape Provincial Health Research Committee (PHRC) held a strategic planning workshop at the MRC Conference Centre on the 15 January 2016. All members were present besides Prof Gey von Pittius and Dr Visser who sent their apologies. It was facilitated by Professor Leslie London from UCT. This is a summary of a more detailed Strategic planning report that is available on request. The plans for 2016 will be detailed and operationalized in follow-on PHRC meetings.

Terms of reference of the PHRC

1. inform and facilitate the process of **priority setting** and to develop and continuously review health research priorities (research agenda) for the province;
2. facilitate the **conduct of relevant research** in the province;
3. aid the **mobilisation of resources** for research undertaken in the province;
4. advise on the **translation** of health research findings into policy development and service provision at all levels of the health care system;
5. Develop and implement a **capacity building** strategy to strengthen research capacity in the province (in collaboration with research stakeholders).

Purpose

- The purpose of the workshop was, as a new committee with new members, to review and expand our engagement with the terms of reference (TOR) of the PHRC, and to prioritise focus areas for 2016.
- We examined in more detail, the five mandates in our TOR and confirmed that all are equally important for the effective functioning of the PHRC.
- Whilst we re-prioritise the TORs for 2016, we agreed that facilitating conduct of research (through process of granting permission for research) is a core, ongoing PHRC activity. We agreed that this needs to be strengthened while we expand our activities in other 4 focal areas in our TOR.

Past strengths

Together with the Health Research sub-directorate, the PHRC is a functional committee that has successfully:

1. Built trust between stakeholders – research institutions and the services
2. Managed research approvals for studies conducted at provincial research institutions and piloted the online National application system (NHRD)
3. Implemented research feedback activities: Annual provincial and selected district Research Days; Research newsletters
4. Engaged with stakeholders regarding research priorities and
 - a. Conducted roadshows with stakeholders explaining its mandate and enlisting support
 - b. Produced provincial research priority brochure.
5. Outputs include:
 - a. Provincial Research Mutual Courtesies document
 - b. A publication in peer reviewed journal about research conducted in the province
 - c. Presented its activities and outputs at national PH conferences.

Challenges were identified for all five mandates

They include:

1. Staffing issues experienced by the secretariat and time-intensive processes resulting in the long turn-around times for permission to conduct the research and access facilities.
2. Mobilisation of resources to deliver on its mandate e.g. *commissioning* research – no dedicated resources to do this.
3. Limited research translation activities-for policy, beyond the existing research feedback activities; understand the obstacles to research translation and develop capacity for this function.
4. Capacity building: Needing to identify more opportunities for engaging with research institutions for a range of activities (workshops, internships) and amongst service managers- to understand research, identify their own research priorities, and build collaborative research activities.
5. Priority setting: for DoH and amongst researchers; identify neglected research areas.

Plans for 2016

The following were identified as deliverables by the end of 2016

- 1. Facilitating research**
 - a. A more efficient permissions system: Target 100% of approvals with a 6 weeks turn-around time.
 - b. Improve feedback system from researchers.
 - c. We must address what is meant by the term 'relevant research' in the TOR and how we assess this.
 - d. Revisit and reinstate template for feedback to the districts on a quarterly basis.
- 2. Translating research**
 - a. Facilitate and encourage researchers to report back to facilities, districts, provincial office.
 - b. System reminding researchers submitting feedback 6 weeks after closing their studies. Template for report submission must accompany research approval letter.
 - c. Policy/research briefs to be completed. Confirm target audience, design and dissemination
 - d. By end of the year a clearer dissemination mechanism should be in place.
- 3. Priority setting**
 - a. A research priority discussion and focus could follow from an annual analysis of research applications by BoD which would identify gaps.
 - b. A template for annual reports could be developed.
 - c. The PHRC could embark on their own internal priority setting process, by identifying one or two priority topics, including seeking out research partners to collaborative produce a proposal, seek funding and execute the research. This would be an opportunity to practice narrowing the research-policy and implementation gap.
- 4. Capacity development (CD)**
 - a. Identify staff interested in research and link up with academic institutions for possible collaborations.
 - b. The focus could be understanding research principles rather than research training
 - c. HRD could develop a module as part of staff development and in service training.
 - d. Target for 2016: Develop material and obtain buy-in from HRD.
 - e. Facilitate opportunities for staff to do research and present their work.
- 5. Mobilising resources**
 - a. The PHRC chair to explore opportunities for research translation with the MRC and other research agencies.
 - b. PHRC to decide on timeline when all actions should be carried out and completed.