



The Caring Communities Program: Evaluation Findings – the Story So Far

Evaluation Bulletin, Number 6, June 2004

The first twelve months of the Caring Communities Program has passed. This Bulletin provides a summary of the evaluation activities carried out so far by the National Evaluation Team (NET).

Evaluation Summary

Progress with the Caring Communities Program and the individual projects funded under the Program is on track. The majority of projects are progressing well. However, delays are being experienced by some projects due primarily to changes in staffing arrangements. For the NET the focus of the first twelve months has been primarily on project evaluation and ensuring key baseline activities have been completed.

The project level evaluation for the first twelve months has included:

- Establishing the project-level evaluation framework;
- Completing site visits to each of the 37 projects;
- Developing and implementing a communication strategy;
- Developing and distributing an evaluation tool kit;
- Undertaking a baseline evaluability assessment of each project; and
- Reviewing the first six monthly reports submitted by each project.

One project (Home Hospice NSW) withdrew from the program without entering into a contract. In early 2004, an alternative project, titled "To establish a formalised coordinated Bereavement Service for Queanbeyan and Yarrowlunla Shire areas" was funded. This contract was signed in mid February and a project officer will be appointed shortly.

Over the next twelve months the National Evaluation Team will focus on the program level

evaluation of the CCP whilst still providing monitoring and support for individual projects.

Ethical approval for program and projects

The NET has received ethics approval for the program level evaluation of the Caring Communities Program through the University of Wollongong (UoW) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This ensures that the proposed methodology conforms to current ethical and data privacy requirements.

The NET has continued its goal of determining the ethical requirements of the CCP Projects and assisting projects in meeting their objectives in this area. To facilitate this, an 'Evaluation Bulletin No 2' was published in June 2003 and included an Ethics Committee Checklist to assist projects in making decisions. The projects' ethics status falls into four broad categories, as shown in Table 1 (next page).

The project does not require ethics approval

4 projects have been identified as not requiring ethics approval. All of these projects focus on increasing community awareness through education and training or improving coordination and communication between existing care providers.

The project requires ethics approval and has access to a local HREC

14 projects have identified that they would seek ethics approval through a local HREC. Of these, 8 have received approval, 1 is awaiting approval, 2 have submitted ethics applications and been advised that ethics approval is not necessary and 3 projects are yet to apply through a local ethics committee.

Table 1 Ethics Committee Status as at March 2004

Ethical Status Categories	No.	Submitted in Period 1 May 03 to Sept 03	Approved in Period 1 May 03 to Sept 03	Submitted in Period 2 October 03 to March	Approved in Period 2 October 03 to March	Total Approved Submitted	Out- standing
Does not require ethics approval	4	-	-	-	-	-	n/a
Requires approval and has access to a local HREC	14	4	4	7	4	8 of 11	3
Requires approval and is submitting to the UoW HREC	15	4	3	4	2	5 of 8	7 not submitted
Unresolved at this time	4						
Total	37	8	7	11	6	13	10

The project requires ethics approval and is submitting an application to the UoW HREC

15 projects have indicated that they would submit an ethics application through the UoW HREC. Of these, 8 projects have submitted applications and 5 have been approved, with 3 pending. 7 projects have not yet submitted an application.

Unresolved at this time

4 projects have yet to resolve the ethical status of their project.

CCP Evaluation Tool Kit

The Tool Kit was distributed to each project by email and post in December 2003.

To assist projects in their use of the Tool Kit, a purpose designed database is being developed that will include all tools in the Tool Kit and allow users to enter data electronically. The database will be distributed to all projects in June 2004. The Tool Kit is also being used in the Rural Palliative Care Program and is available on the CCP website for general usage.

Projects have been asked to advise the NET which tools they intend to incorporate into their evaluation strategy.

It is important to note that it is not obligatory for projects to use the tools developed by the

NET. However, the limited use of the tools means that it will be more difficult to compare results between similar projects. For this reason, we have been encouraging projects to use the Tool Kit where it contains tools that are relevant to their project. Initial feedback suggests that many projects have modified tools from the Tool Kit to suit their needs.

Tools 4, 5 and 6

As part of our evaluation approach, the NET have requested that a questionnaire be completed on the sustainability, capacity building and generalisability of each project at various stages during its course. The questionnaires are included in the CCP Tool Kit as tools 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

To date, only 16 of the 37 projects have submitted all three tools. The reasons for the delay in submitting the questionnaires include:

- 1 new project is not yet required to submit data;
- 1 project has an agreed contract variation with the Australian Government and is not yet required to submit data;
- 5 projects submitted an earlier version of the tools; and
- 2 projects are currently unable to locate completed tools.

This issue raises concerns about how the NET will evaluate issues relating to sustainability, generalisability and capacity building.

Evaluability Assessment

A member of the NET has now visited each project. Table 2 (next page) provides a summary of the evaluability of the 36 projects at the completion of the site visits.

Risk assessment

Table 3 (next page) summarises our risk assessment of the projects. You can see that of the 36 risk assessments now carried out, 29 projects are considered to be at low risk of failing to complete their agreed objectives. The 7 projects previously assessed as being either medium or high risk are being provided with additional support from the NET. In 2 cases, additional site visits have been conducted and regular telephone communication is being maintained with these projects.

Table 4 (next page) summarises our assessment of the ongoing support needs of the projects. Of the 36 assessments carried out to date, twenty-three are considered to require low levels of on going support.

Six monthly report – results and discussion

Work with the DHA State/Territory Offices to finalise a Six Monthly Progress Report template was completed in September 2003. In most cases, projects have now completed their first six monthly progress report which has been provided to the NET.

Process issues

The majority of project reports (28) were completed to the satisfaction of DHA officers in the relevant State/Territory offices. In three cases, projects were required to re-write elements of their progress report. In almost all cases (88%) project reports addressed relevant issues and provided a clear indication of the status of the project and activities undertaken.

Project activities

In total, 28 projects reported that outcomes/deliverables were produced within the reporting period. However, 5 projects indicated that outcomes/deliverables were not accomplished. Reasons for this were:

- The late appointment of a project officer;
- The busy workload of the reference group;
- The unplanned factor of the emergence of a local rural palliative care project has delayed activities in the CCP project due to an ongoing debate regarding possible collaboration;
- Lack of staff and lack of resources; and
- Sickness of key personnel.

Evaluation activities

In total, twenty four projects indicated that evaluation activities had been carried out. Of these, twenty one projects have collected baseline data with 7 projects collecting qualitative data, 2 quantitative and twelve collecting a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Twelve projects indicated that they have or will use one or more tool from the CHSD Tool Kit. Nineteen projects indicated that they have developed new evaluation tools. Nineteen projects indicated that they were able to outline appropriate evaluation activities.

Dissemination activities

The majority of projects (25 projects) have engaged in at least one dissemination activity with the most popular in order of priority being:

- Presentation or talk to staff at one service or agency in the local area;
- Talk to staff from more than one service or agency in the local area;
- Story or article in a local magazine or newsletter;
- Information provided on a website.

Table 2 Evaluability Assessment Summary

Summary Availability Assessment	Period 1	Period 2	Total
External evaluator employed, project is capable of being evaluated	5	1	6
Well developed evaluation plan requiring little further assistance	14	1	15
Requires assistance to develop evaluation activities and ensure that project can be evaluated	15	-	15
Total	34	2	36

Table 3 Summary Risk Assessment of projects failing to fulfil agreed objectives of the Caring Communities Program as at February 2004

Risk	Number of projects (Period 1)	Number of projects (Period 2)	Number of projects (Period 2)
1. Low	27	2	29
2. Medium	4	-	4
3. High	3	-	3
All	34	2	36

Table 4 Ongoing support needs of projects

Ongoing support needs	Number of projects (Period 1)	Number of projects (Period 2)	Number of projects (Period 2)
1. Low - little or no contact	21	2	23
2. Medium - one or more calls a month	7	-	7
3. High - eg, 1 or more calls a week	6	-	6
All	34	2	36

There is also evidence that projects are communicating with a range of stakeholders from local community groups through to national bodies and using a variety of media - newsletters, radio, local papers, flyers and conference presentations.

Sustainability, capacity building and generalisability activities

The six monthly reports contain provision for projects to report on sustainability, capacity building and generalisability activities that have occurred during the reporting period. Results in this area are particularly promising with capacity building issues being addressed by 23 projects, sustainability issues being addressed by 22 projects and generalisability issues being addressed by 21 projects.

After thoughts...

2 issues are currently raising concerns for the NET;

- Ethical status of projects
- Completion of tools 4, 5 and 6

If you have indicated that your project requires **ETHICS APPROVAL** and have not yet submitted an ethics application please liaise with your NET member **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**.

Also if you have not yet done so, **PLEASE COMPLETE TOOLS 4, 5 AND 6 AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**.

Our next Bulletin will share some of the evaluation activities that have been happening around the country. Let us know if you have a story to share?

Should you have any questions about the evaluation process, please do not hesitate to contact your NET representative or alternatively give us a call on our Hotline (0407 935 384).