

# The Establishment of a Rural Research Network

The Rural Aotearoa Research Network (RAOR) is a national emergent organisation, purposed to improve health and health care for rural people by strengthening synergies between research teams, rural organisations, iwi/communities and health providers, making rural research more meaningful for the communities it serves.

Its co-governance strategy for research processes aims to optimise these relationships. The focus will be on facilitating high quality, translatable rural research that can make a difference to the wellbeing of rural communities and increase the job satisfaction of rural health professionals in a timely manner.

Advancing research to improve healthcare for rural people is often a discussion of equity. However, advancing research for our rural communities is also about improving the economic sustainability and success of the rural sector. The health of our rural people is both an economic and social issue. Our nation's primary industries are largely rurally based, consequently, the wellbeing of our rural communities goes hand-in-hand with New Zealand's prosperity.

The Network has commenced on funding of \$100,000 from Health Research South and the Division of Health Sciences, University of Otago. This funding covers the essential components of the Network's central workings, such as, a Network coordinator and essential communication features (website and newsletter), and networking opportunities, including the network's presence at A&P shows and field day events. In addition, the Network plans to provide research symposiums and support to for rural research through Quality Improvement awards that will be awarded via a contestable funding round; criteria of which will soon be announced and the awards will be open to rural health providers and rural community groups.



Dr Fiona Doolan-Noble and Ms Georgina Richardson after receiving the Research Development Award for the establishment of a rural research network.

When putting together the proposal for funding for the Network, it was evident to Dr Fiona Doolan-Noble that an initiative was needed that:

- Bridged the gap between the focus of researcher generated research projects and matters that are of particular importance and relevance to rural people and health providers.
- Bridged gaps between research outputs and quality improvement, and could then enhance policy and practice.

The Network will be well-positioned to address these points and ideally positioned to be a national change maker in the landscape of rural research in NZ.

RAOR also seeks to complement other organisations and initiatives in rural by:

- Providing pathways to capacity building and professional development for research, linking in with the Division of Health Science's, University of Otago, Rural Health Plan.
- Complimenting the activities of Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHĀNZ), RHĀNZ has indicated the importance of more work in the areas that RAOR is directly purposed to achieve: building wellbeing across rural, responding to the higher priorities of rural people, increasing equity of health provision for rural people, improving connectivity across rural, and supporting the rural health workforce.
- Working with other disciplines across multiple tertiary institutions related to the broad health scope of RAOR, including integrating our work across ecology, agriculture, sociology, health sciences, anthropology, education, accountancy/economics, business - Lean Thinking and supply chain management, geography and human geography, philosophy and ethics, legal and local government.
- Liaising with the One Health Aotearoa group who comprise those working in the areas of veterinary, human and environmental health. Collaboration between the Network and One Health Aotearoa has the potential to generate significant benefits for the rural sector.
- Complementing the Rural Medical Immersion Programme (RMIP), University of Otago, by stimulating interests in rural health and associated research.
- Being pertinent to actioning the revised New Zealand Health Research Strategy and the inter-disciplinary, inter-sectoral research collaboration encouraged for investing in Aotearoa's future.

To date members of the Network have achieved funding for two projects (currently underway) on which further projects can be built under the umbrella of the Network:

1. **Rural nursing: engaging with the benefits and challenges of the rural setting for sustainable workforce development** (PI Fiona Doolan-Noble, CIs Tim Stokes and Emma Tumilty). Funded by Lottery Health.
2. **Living rurally with an implantable cardioverter defibrillator** (PI Fiona Doolan-Noble, CIs Tim Stokes, Garry Nixon, Geoff Noller). Funded by Southland Medical Foundation.

Membership of the Network is free. To join or if you want more information please contact the Network's coordinator Ms Georgina Richardson on [Georgina.Richardson@otago.ac.nz](mailto:Georgina.Richardson@otago.ac.nz)

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