

Building Ageing Research Capacity Colloquium

Research Development and Communication Processes Workshops

Morning Workshop 4—Building Collaborative Research with Industry

Presented by:



Day 2–5 July
10:35–11:55 AM

Contributors to the background paper:

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Disclaimer:

This is a background document that has been produced by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well and is only to be used for the purpose of informing discussion at the workshop on 5 July 2006. The materials contained herein are not available for the purposes of quotation until the workshop discussion has been incorporated. An updated version will be sent to all workshop participants and will be made available on the Network website (www.ageingwell.edu.au).

Any statements about proposed Network actions or directions are statements of possibility only. Directions will be determined at a later date after taking into consideration the discussion at the workshop.

Research Network
Convened at



Major Partners



Building Collaborative Research with Industry

Aims

- 1) To facilitate collaborative research around Australia between industry and research
- 2) To highlight to research, industry and government the benefits of collaborative research and the best way to conduct linkages
- 3) To promote the involvement of a broader range of industries in research collaborations

Issues

- 1) What do we mean by industry – is it limited to aged care or should we take a broader perspective and include banking, retail, transport, tourism etc?
- 2) Key concerns regarding collaborative research – expectation of timeframes, clarity of purpose, perception of bias etc

Possible Collaborative Actions Facilitated by the Network (for discussion)

- 1) Produce a paper on issues and best practice in collaborative research?
- 2) Discuss collaborative research options at various state and other meetings of researchers and industry groups?
- 3) Network to resources building collaborative research proposals either at the state or national level?
- 4) Advocacy to state and commonwealth governments and industry on conducting collaborative research?

Background

1) What do we mean by Industry?

Over the past few decades a common focus for all levels of government has been to extend and improve life for members of society. Thus, great attention and resources have been channelled towards the reduction and management of disease and illnesses. A result of the focus on improvements in medical and health services has been the extension of life so that many more individuals are living longer and in better health.

Most older people lead active and engaged lives while living independently in the community. However towards the end of life, chronic illnesses and associated disabilities may become a major barrier to independent living for a proportion of older people. The provision of assistance (including residential and community services) to these individuals has been termed 'aged care'. The aged care industry incorporates a wide range of services supplied by a large number of service providers across all states and territories and is located within with broader health sector (including private and public). In addition, the aged care industry involves the provision of care by a wide range of health professionals and para-professionals. The aged care industry sector is therefore extremely large in terms of numbers of people employed and organisations delivering services and even larger when viewed within the wider health sector.

As a result of this large and identifiable industry, often research in 'ageing' is equated with research in 'aged care'. Certainly, the aged care industry is and should be a strong participant in research. However 'aged care' is one of many issues that fall within the wider field of ageing research.

Most older adults live active and independent lives within the community setting. In order to maintain this independence and well-being throughout their entire lifetimes, a range of issues need to be addressed and researched within the wider ageing context. Topics for ageing research should include (as examples only):

- Transport (public and private)
- Financial
- Life long learning
- Employment
- Volunteering
- Social networks/friendships/family
- Spirituality
- Housing/accommodation
- Leisure
- Holiday and business travel
- Retirement
- Technology (equipment and communication)
- Politics
- Products and services
- Intergenerational activities
- Care giving
- etc

Engagement in research around these issues implies that the understanding and incorporation of industry must be broadened to include (as examples):

- Transportation providers
- Vehicle manufacturers
- Engineers
- Financial planners
- Education specialists
- Employers
- Religious specialists
- Property developers
- Town planners
- Builders
- Trades people
- Technology developers
- Communication providers
- Restaurants
- Travel companies
- Airlines
- Resorts
- Financial planners
- Financial institutions
- Personal trainers
- Political parties
- Manufacturers
- Retail businesses
- Universities
- Government departments (local, state and national)
- etc

Older adults are as diverse as the wider Australian population and the issues facing them are complex and multi-layered. Addressing relevant and meaningful issues requires researchers to engage with a wide range of industry partners - many of whom would not identify themselves as players within the 'ageing industry'.

2) Key concerns regarding collaborative research

Case Study: Aged Care Industry

Illustrative of the views of industry on research partnerships with the university sector are the results of a May 2006 inventory of members of the Aged & Community Services Association of NSW & ACT (ACS).

ACS represents 300 church, charitable and not-for-profit organisations providing residential aged care, community care and retirement housing in NSW and the ACT. ACS has identified strengthening research capacity as a critical component in the future of the aged and community care industry. It is particularly interested in promoting research with a practical benefit to policy and practice around residential aged care, community care and retirement living.

The industry research inventory was distributed via email to all ACS members with 60 replies from 57 organisations (4 replies were received from 1 large organisation's regions and head office). This represented a response rate of 19%, meaning the results should be treated as indicative rather than fully representative.

44% of respondents reported participating in one or more research projects in the past year, with 54% saying they had not.

Non-participants

The 32 non-participating organisations indicated two main reasons for non-participation, each cited by roughly half of respondents:

- Lack of opportunity / not being approached to participate
- Limited resources: staff time, funding.

A number of replies indicated smaller organisations or those in rural and remote areas thought they had little to offer researchers.

By contrast, all but 4 organisations indicated they would like to participate in research in the future. The availability of resources is a key constraint. To quote one respondent, “Yes, depending of course on timing and resources available. Plenty of notice is important.” But it also clear many organisations are just waiting to be asked.

Participants

The inventory also asked the 25 organisations that had participated in one or more research project a series of questions about the experience.

The most common areas where organisations had participated in research projects were:

- Clinical practice in residential care
- Review of service effectiveness and outcomes
- Community participation by older people
- Clinical practice in community care
- Services to disadvantaged groups.

Half of the participating organisations had sponsored staff to participate in research (eg via postgraduate study).

A third of participating organisations employed one or more staff members who have a role to undertake or coordinate research for the organisation. This was most often a responsibility added onto another role, eg as a Clinical Nurse Consultant, but in two organisations (one a consumer peak body; one a large church agency) there were part-time or full-time staff dedicated to research.

Only a quarter of participating organisations provided some direct funding for the conduct of research projects, nearly always larger organisations and relatively small amounts of money.

Most organisations reported finding the research useful, with comments such as:

Extremely useful in that it has helped improve practice by identifying the co-morbidities associated with skin tears and falls.

The aromatherapy trial has provided better outcomes for some residents and has improved staff knowledge and skills through education and closer ties with the university.

While most organisations found the experience positive, the negative experiences included a lack of proper feedback and not enough time or resources to implement identified changes. A common complaint was that the research took too long! One respondent summed up the comments well:

What works – Where the research is aligned to our priorities and the involvement of key staff assists in their professional development; Where the client outcomes can be improved as a result or current approaches validated.

What doesn't work – Where the agreement for collaboration with the university is purely about obtaining research grants for them; We need longer term commitment for the universities to support the growth and development of staff and practice.

Lessons

Key lessons for successful collaborations are:

- Good communication at beginning and throughout project
- Alignment of goals between university and industry partners
- Production of results which can be of practical assistance to industry organisations
- Development of long-term relationships.

Working with Industry Partners (researchers perspective)

Benefits of working with collaborative research teams, including industry partners

1. Broad range of expertise, experience and knowledge
Industry partners bring unique and valuable perspectives to research. They often have experience in working directly with the issue at hand. They can work closely with researchers to ensure that relevant questions are addressed, increasing the meaningfulness of outcomes.
2. Increases research networks - potential to access networks of each industry partner
Having access to partner networks may increase opportunities for collaboration with relevant and interested organisations. Dissemination of research results is also enhanced through partner networks.
3. Potential for mentoring relationships to develop between universities/ organisations and between more experienced researchers and novice researchers
Work between partners and universities may increase research capacity within both organisations through quality experiences, knowledge development and positive outcomes.
4. Increases problem solving ability
Issues facing older people are multi-dimensional and diverse. Thus conducting research in the field of ageing requires research teams to have the ability to problem solve in areas such as problem identification, methods, engagement, analysis, interpretation and so forth. Industry partners can enhance the teams' ability to strategically work through issues throughout the project.

Issues associated with collaborative research teams

1. Personnel changes (fluidity within organisations)
2. Finding mutually convenient meeting times
Teleconferencing may be a good alternative
3. Differing organisational interests in the broad research topic
Need to identify key interests of each partner and ensure these are embedded within the research inquiry
4. Differing values of organisations and individuals