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Services for Australian
Rural and Remote Allied Health

**Australian Autism Research Collaboration
Working Group**

**SARRAH's response: review of
autism interventions funded
under the Helping Children with
Autism (HCWA) program**

May 2011

INTRODUCTION

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH), welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Autism Research Collaboration (AARC) Working Group on the review of autism interventions funded under the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) program.

SARRAH is nationally recognised as a peak body representing rural and remote Allied Health Professionals working in both the public and private sector.

SARRAH's representation comes from a range of allied health professions including but not limited to: Audiology, Dietetics, Exercised Physiology, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Oral Health, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Psychology, Social Work and Speech Pathology.

These Allied Health Professionals provide a range of clinical and health education services to individuals who live in rural and remote communities. Allied Health Professionals are critical in the management of their clients' health needs, particularly with chronic disease and complex care needs.

Allied Health Professionals work across the Primary and Acute Health Care Services continuum. They have significant roles in health care and health education across the sectors.

It is repeatedly demonstrated that skilled and supported Allied Health Professional services are essential to improving the quality of life and better health outcomes for rural and remote communities.

SARRAH maintains that every Australian should have access to equitable health services wherever they live and that Allied Health Professional services are basic and core to Australians' primary health care and wellbeing. It is the Government's responsibility to ensure the provision of this care.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Whilst SARRAH has not responded directly to the questions posed by the AARC Working Group we provide the following general comments.

SARRAH would like to ensure that evaluation of the HCWA program takes into account equity of access for rural and remote residents who are eligible for these services.

In some rural and remote areas the current private practice based model is viable and appropriate, however in other areas there are no or very limited private practices available to provide services. SARRAH would like to see attention given to:

- Greater flexibility within the current funding arrangements, where resources can be applied to cover the travel costs of approved panel providers, to enable a fly-in-fly-out service to be provided where no suitable local private or public service is available. Similarly greater flexibility should be

introduced for consumers to utilise program funds to support travel to access approved panel providers for families residing in rural or remote communities.

- Support for the development of consortium models covering rural and remote areas. These would encourage and support private practitioners and public Allied Health Professionals with right of private practice to apply to be approved providers and participate in the consortium, thereby increasing the pool of available, approved providers.
- Where there are no suitable private practitioner options available, (either existing or that can be put in place) then families should be able to purchase the service from available public providers, for example State Health, under the same conditions and controls applicable to private providers. It is not suggested that funding be allocated directly to State services or that this model be introduced where needs are already being met, but that under special circumstances an exemption be provided with appropriate controls in place.

In addition, it is recommended that the Better Start program (due to commence 1 July 2011) administration be linked with the HCWA program to streamline panel approvals, agreements and administration.

CONCLUSION

SARRAH as the peak body representing Allied Health Professionals delivering health services to people residing in rural and remote communities across Australia is well positioned to work with Governments and other stakeholders to provide advice on the future development and ongoing implementation of the HCWA program.