

RADAR – The Development of a Rurally Based AOD Research Consortium.

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Introduction

Despite evidence that drug and alcohol issues are prevalent within rural areas of the country, most research in the AOD space occurs within the metro areas of NSW or through a metro lens. RADAR (Rural Applied Drug and Alcohol Research) is an attempt to redress this balance.

Approach

Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD) is a large LHD which incorporates 3 rural cities and a number of much smaller towns throughout the district. There is a large Aboriginal population estimated to make up 13% of the total population. Charles Sturt University (CSU) is a rural university which has a rural medical school based in Orange which takes in predominantly students with a rural background.

A number of meetings were held in 2023 between WNSWLHD and CSU to establish RADAR. RADAR was established in mid-2024 and now meets monthly. Aims of RADAR are to

1. Encourage rurally focussed and relevant AOD Research
2. Provide both qualitative and quantitative data to inform the provision and expansion of AOD clinical services
3. Encourage medical students and Junior doctors to do research within the AOD space
4. Work with other universities and DACRIN in state-wide and national research projects

Achievements

2 research projects funded by the Rural Health Research Institute are underway:

Enhancing Access to Drug and Alcohol Services (EADAS) in Western NSW LHD.

Evaluation of a pilot program providing LAIB within a small remote town with limited AOD Services.

Also

Involvement with the Release Study via DACRIN.

This led to the ability to employ a full time research assistant.

Implications for practice and policy

The development of RADAR has shown that research, appropriate to rural areas, is achievable and provides support to clinical services within these districts. Having both major partners-the LHD and CSU- based rurally, allows focussed regional research to take place.