

## Research Networks

A Ground Up  
Approach



### Background

- Research networks have emerged as a leading strategy for building research capacity under the PHCRED Strategy
- Potential to play a major role in strengthening PHC research
- Effective way of making research relevant, realistic and accessible

### Networks in NSW

- Key explicit strategy of the NSW program
- Many, with varied purposes & functions
  - EARIG, HEARNET, PHReNet, Rural Net
  - Membership - small to large
- Tend to take a bottom up approach and occur in the environment of practitioners
- Structure & membership tailored to suit local circumstances
- Ongoing structure independent of individual research projects

### What do they do?

- Develop links with other researchers
- Benefit from each others experience
- Access peer support
- Connect members to research expertise and projects
- Provision of research skill development
- Disseminate information

## Idealism

*vs Reality*

*PHReNet*

- Broad PHC Network
  - *Challenge to work with many diff groups*
- Increase in skilled research workforce
  - *Require training & support at different levels*
- Develop research ideas
  - *Interest but lack time, to attend training & become skilled*
- Increase in research conducted
  - *Funding & remuneration*
- Outputs (presentations, publications, grants, higher degrees etc.)
  - *Need confidence to follow through in research process*
- Building organisational capacity
  - *Time spent nurturing others*

## Challenges

- Ensuring broad engagement
- Maintaining commitment and enthusiasm
- Sustainability - what happens if we aren't here?
- Evaluating the impact and outcomes of research networks
- Tension between having a dynamic and ever expanding network and struggling with needs of existing members / network
- Balancing network growth with membership that becomes more active and more responsible in developing the network themselves

## Challenges cont...

- Information dissemination takes resources
- Takes time - time poor, many staff are employed on part time basis
- Limitations to research support
- Limits to capacity to develop own skills
- Staff isolation - staff require support and professional development to avoid burnout
- Limited funding a reality but need adequate funding to resource the network

## Lessons Learnt

- More active membership more time
- Be more strategic about which and how projects are supported
- Regular meetings between regional staff
- Forming and facilitating research interest groups
- Transfer of staff knowledge
- Maintain profile and support levels consistent with our capacity to provide them
- Increase funding to increase capacity
- We can't be all things to all people
- Building research capacity is a long term commitment