



The Rural Services Network

National Rural Conference 2024

Delivering for Rural - Unlocking rural prosperity

Thursday 19th September

Rural Health & Care Session

AI GENERATED SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

Rural Health and Care Introduction

Kerry Booth, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, welcomed participants to the Rural Health and Care session of the National Rural Conference, thanked the conference's supporters and sponsors, and briefly discussed the Rural Services Network's role as the National Champion for rural services. Kerry emphasized the RSN's role in advocating for fairer funding for rural public services and rural policy, she highlighted rural challenges including access to healthcare, an aging population, mental health issues, inadequate housing, inadequate transport and the need for joined up thinking.

Rural Services Network and Brazilian Family Health Strategy

Matt Harris, Clinical Senior Lecturer in Public Health, Imperial College London and Donna Chapman, Development Manager, NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly made a presentation on the Brazilian Family Health Strategy, a primary care solution that has been expanded across Brazil over the last 30 years. The strategy involves community health workers who visit households regularly to proactively address residents' needs. The strategy has been implemented in Cornwall and other parts of the UK, with promising results.

Community Health Worker Program in Cornwall

Donna from NHS Cornwall discussed the implementation of a community health worker program in Cornwall, aimed at addressing inequalities and improving health outcomes in deprived areas. The program, based on the Brazilian model, involves deploying community health workers to hyper-local areas of 150 households, with no restrictions on age or clinical groups. The workers are employed by the voluntary sector and are integrated with GP practices, community teams, and adult social care teams. The program has been rolled out to 39 lower super output areas, with plans to expand to more areas in the future. Donna also highlighted the importance of building trust and long-term relationships with the community, as well as the successful recruitment of workers based on their knowledge of the local community. The program has seen a 90% improvement in wellbeing scores over a period of time, with the top issues being finance, housing, mental health, and loneliness. The program has also been able to identify the most deprived areas and the age profile of the people they are working with. Donna mentioned that the program has a 5-year contract with the voluntary sector and that they are planning to focus on hypertension in the more established teams. Donna discussed the development of a national maturity matrix for a program, with support from the National

Association of Primary Care. She also shared that the program was shortlisted for the HSJ awards and that the West team was nominated for partnership working. Donna explained that the areas chosen for the program were ranked based on IMD scores, public health guidance, and other localized factors. Matt from Imperial College London, who works with the National Association of Primary Care, encouraged others to contact him for resources and tools to help scale and spread the programme. Donna clarified that the roles in the program are paid positions, with Volunteer Cornwall overseeing the program and providing support, development, and training for community health workers.

Rural and Coastal Community Research Institute Rebranding

Professor Mark Gussy from the University of Lincoln gave a presentation on the Lincolnshire Institute for Rural and Coastal Health. Its focus is on rural and coastal communities, equity, and community participation in research, by making use of publicly available data to maximize its value. Funded by UK Research and Innovation, the Institute uses a geospatial lens to understand the relationship between geographical features and the issues faced by these communities. Mark highlighted the unique health challenges faced by rural and coastal communities, particularly those with low income and disadvantaged populations. Four research themes were outlined, including rural and coastal service access, health equity and inclusion, community-led health and social care design, and climate change and geospatial epidemiology. Mark also discussed the expansion of their scope to include geospatial issues and the importance of addressing mental health issues in rural areas. Ongoing research includes a digital exclusion tool and a toolkit for increasing participation of rural and coastal communities in health and social care research, as well as research on food security. Mark emphasized the Institute's inclusiveness and invited collaborations, with details on how to get in touch in his presentation. A question from the Community Transport Association was addressed, with Mark confirming that they consider public and private transport in their research. He also mentioned a digital exclusion tool specific to their local area, which they are willing to share with interested parties.

Addressing Mental Health in UK Farming Communities

Caron Whaley, Director of Services, RABI presented on supporting the health and wellbeing of the farming community. She discussed RABI's history, their services, and their commitment to improving the wellbeing of farming people. She also highlighted the importance of collaboration with partners in reaching farming people. Caron highlighted the challenges faced by farming people in the UK, including mental and physical health issues. She shared the results of a survey conducted in 2021, which showed that 36% of farming people were likely or possibly depressed, and 58% of farming women were experiencing anxiety. Caron also mentioned the introduction of three new services to address these issues: in-person mental health counselling, a click and chat wellbeing platform, and accredited mental health awareness training. Caron emphasized the importance of normalizing conversations around mental wellbeing and the need for increased support for farming people.

Expanding Rural Support and Mental Health Initiatives

Caron from RABI discussed the organization's plans to expand their click and chat access support into younger rural farming communities through partnerships with the National Federation of Young Farmers and the Farm Safety Foundation. She highlighted the importance of collaboration to improve mental and physical wellbeing in rural communities, and the need for targeted financial support and improved access to healthcare. Caron also mentioned RABI's commitment to influencing Westminster and their plans for a summit focused on mental health in rural communities. Cllr Richard Cox from Lichfield expressed his interest in involving district and boroughs in addressing mental health issues, particularly among farmers.

Mental Health Services, Training, and Funding Discussion

The meeting discussed the availability of professional services and training for mental health, particularly for the farming community. It was agreed that these services could be promoted to other organizations and that they could potentially access the training. The importance of prevention in healthcare was emphasized, with a focus on moving from a transactional system to a relational one. The need for more funding for community health and wellbeing workers was

also highlighted, as they play a crucial role in coordinating and navigating healthcare services and prevention.

Addressing Rural Community Challenges and Growth

Caron from RABI emphasized the need for partnerships with organizations like Citizens Advice to effectively reach rural communities. Rachel Allen from North Yorkshire Citizens Advice & Law Centre highlighted the vulnerability of farming communities and the need for preventive measures. Kerry Booth stressed the importance of politicians and decision-makers listening to rural communities and leveraging their capacity for sustainable solutions. The panel also acknowledged the positive aspects of living in rural areas and the potential for growth through collaboration and partnerships.

Research Funding for Grassroots Tools and Techniques

Cllr Richard Stobart from South Cambridgeshire expressed interest in the availability of research funding for tools and techniques that could be used at the grassroots level. Professor Mark Gussy, responded positively, stating that the investment in the Lincoln Institute of Rural and Coastal Health was significant and that the environment was more favourable for rural and coastal research funding. Cllr Stobart also mentioned the involvement of community members in the generation of knowledge and the need for researchers skilled in bridging data from climate change, environmental degradation, and health and wellbeing. The possibility of attracting data scientists was also discussed, with Cllr Stobart mentioning the need to develop a research environment that attracts and nurtures talent.