Active Ageing through Employment: Implementing a Health in All Policies approach across the health sector through action

Isobel Ludford1, Rama Ramanathan2, Deb Wildgoose1, Amy Foote2, Deb Williams1, Kate Saint3, Carmel Williams1.

1. Health in All Policies Unit, Department for Health and Ageing, South Australia.
2. Country Health SA Local Health Network, Department for Health and Ageing, South Australia.
3. South Australian Community Health Research Unit, Flinders University of South Australia.

Background

Australia has a rapidly ageing population and this presents a range of opportunities and challenges, particularly in relation to service delivery, employment and rates of chronic disease. In South Australia (SA), one in six people are aged 65 years and older, with older people and those affected by chronic disease over-represented in regional areas.1 This presents two significant challenges to the workforce in regional areas:

- supporting the health and wellbeing of the existing workforce
- retaining the workforce as it becomes older and a greater proportion move closer to retirement age.

The Active Ageing through Employment project is a joint initiative of the Health in All Policies Unit and the Country Health SA Local Health Network (CHSALHN). The project aims to:

- examine how policies and practices across all sectors impact on paid employment for older South Australians in regional areas
- identify opportunities for older people in regional SA to remain in the workforce (if they choose to)
- build the capacity of CHSALHN staff to act on the social determinants of health.

Health in All Policies in South Australia

Health in All Policies is a joint initiative of the SA Department for Health and Ageing and Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Health in All Policies provides a framework and mandate for inter-sectoral work on the social determinants of health, and is typically applied to the core business of non-health sectors. However, it is increasingly recognised that work is required to build capacity within the health sector to act intersectorally on the social determinants of health.

Method

The project was conceptualised as three distinct but interrelated stages: 1. stakeholder consultation with the agencies who have policy influence over the determinants of employment in regional SA 2. desktop analysis of employment related policy and practice opportunities 3. building on the existing capacity of CHSALHN staff to act on the determinants of health. This section focuses on the capacity building aspect of the project.

Phase 1 – Initial engagement (complete)

Phase 1 focused on facilitating ownership of the project by CHSALHN staff.

- Identified key regional CHSALHN staff who assisted in organising staff workshops in four regional areas
- Identified and linked the project with strategic opportunities, including the work of Thinker in Residence Dr Alexandre Kalache, who presented to staff at the workshops
- Localised the project through a focus on the identification of barriers and enablers to employment for older people and the policy opportunities in regional SA.

Phase 2 – Mapping of local policy opportunities (underway)

Phase 2 will focus on establishing relationships with regional CHSALHN staff and identifying agencies in the regions that could be involved in the desktop analysis. This will be done by:

- Identifying key regional staff in each of the 11 CHSALHN clusters
- Surveying regional staff to identify some of the employment related issues and context in their region, and key regional partners
- Convening a workshop for regional staff to discuss the project and its implementation in the regions
- Working with regional staff to develop an example of what a policy opportunity might look like for their region, using the steps described below

- Collecting evidence for employment policy/levers
- Reviewing core business & strategic directions of departments
- Identifying employment policy and practice opportunities
- Linking employment benefits to departments/ target audience
- Mapping benefits to departments/core business and goals
- Identifying long term benefits to the population

- Working with regional staff to identify and map the key agencies and partners in their regions for inclusion in a desktop analysis, which will be completed by Flinders University.

Phase 3 – Training and support for CHSALHN staff

- Formal professional development for CHSALHN staff focused on cross-sectoral engagement and action on the social determinants of health
- Support from the project team as regional staff begin to engage with other sectors in their regions to negotiate the policy recommendations arising out of the desktop analysis.

Anticipated Results

Anticipated outcomes of the project:

- A renewed focus on upstream prevention is incorporated into CHSALHN practice
- CHSALHN becomes a model of good practice in relation to workplace policies and practices
- CHSALHN staff: re-establish and strengthen working relationships with non-health agencies in their region develop a greater understanding of their policies and practices become facilitators for the cause in the broader community

Discussion

Recent budgets cuts within the health sector have seen health agencies narrow their focus back to core business. Building the capacity of the health sector to act on the determinants of health is necessary to encourage a focus on upstream, preventative health activities often overlooked in program planning. In addition, the ageing population has significant implications for the health workforce, particularly in terms of personnel availability and productivity. It is therefore necessary to identify and act on the determinants of employment to ensure those who want to continue working can do so.

The engagement strategy of the Active Ageing through Employment project has emphasised the importance of local ownership of a project to facilitate a ‘learning by doing’ approach to working across sectors. Factors which have contributed to the strategy’s success have included:

- Obtaining high level executive support for the project and identifying beneficial outcomes for all partners
- Being opportunistic in developing partnerships and linking the project to the broader government agenda
- Recognising the importance of the regional health workforce in acting on the social determinants of health
- Starting from the concerns of CHSALHN staff and then moving to a broader discussion around workplaces outside of health
- Engaging individuals in regional areas and drawing on their knowledge as both CHSALHN staff and community members.

References


Contact

For further information, please contact Health in All Policies unit, SA Department for Health and Ageing at hiaa@health.sa.gov.au or on (08) 8226 7100 or visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthinallpolicies.