



# Partnerships for Healthier Communities

*- A study looking at the nature and extent of partnerships between a rural area health service and the local councils in its region*



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The *Partnerships for Healthier Communities* initiative of Greater Southern Area Health Service (GSAHS) aims to build on existing ways of working with local government, using social planning mechanisms to achieve mutual outcomes for the health of target communities. This initiative aims to create solid partnerships between the key drivers of the broader determinants of health, to enable them to plan jointly and to achieve mutual outcomes for the health of their community.

A survey was distributed to the 39 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the GSAHS region to capture a broad range of baseline data in relation to key characteristics of partnerships that address broad health outcomes.

The key findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data in this study indicate that partnerships have been a mainly positive experience for councils and encouraged them to continue to work in partnership with GSAHS. Councils value partnerships to achieve broad and specific health outcomes and consider them effective in addressing social determinant aims, irrespective of size of council.

In comparing the results of this survey with the literature and other surveys, we can conclude that some new findings have been uncovered in relation to:

- Rural councils do participate in partnership work, irrespective of size
- Seeking funds is not the key reason for councils to establish partnerships
- Rural partnerships are more well developed than previously reported
- Smaller councils are just as likely to undertake partnership work
- Rural councils prioritise broader outcomes over health protection outcomes, particularly the smaller ones
- Half of respondent councils had a specific social determinant focus in their partnership work
- The impact of health service restructures on partnership outcomes

We can conclude that rural councils do have some understanding about the determinants of health and that working to achieve these outcomes is a clear priority for them in any partnership work with an area health service.

These are interesting and beneficial results for practitioners that focus on developing partnerships to address structural determinants of health in rural local government areas.

*For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'*

Alison Mac Taggart is currently Manager of Partnerships and Research with the Greater Southern Area Health Service. Fostering effective partnerships to build capacity to address social determinant and health equity issues is a key focus of her work.

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