

Link People Report January 2007

1. Introduction

The Commonwealth Agreement of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) requires that each partner organisation appoints a Link person to undertake liaison between the partner and the CRAH.

The Link Person role facilitates involvement with and information flow within and between Partner organisations and the CRAH. The role can also facilitate the strengthening of effective collaborative partnerships. In realising its potential, the role requires the support of both the CRAH and the Partner organisation within which it sits.

The Link people's role is essential to the participation of partners in our activities and the development of the CRAH community. In December 2005 the CRAH appointed a Link Coordinator, and conducted a Link satisfaction survey in November 2006. This report reflects on some of the work of the Link people and summarises the results of the survey.

2. Link people's activities in 2006

The CRAH had a busy 2006 and the Link people were involved throughout the year. Below is a summary of the Link people's activities:

Link meetings – the Link people met 7 times in 2006 with one face to face meeting in June. These meetings allow the Link people to receive updates and give feedback.

Link inductions – in April and in October inductions were held for new Link people to familiarise them with the CRAH and some of the responsibilities of Link people.

Collecting data – Link people are responsible for coordinating the collection of in-kind information twice a year – this work requires close attention to detail and patience.

CRAH Showcases – most CRAH partners were involved in organising local Showcases of CRAH work in late 2005 and 2006. Link people took a key role in the organisation, particularly in ensuring partners and local community and government representatives were involved.

CRAH Symposium - Link people were crucial to the high number (140) at the national Symposium in November. They promoted the event in their organisations, and identified and organised their local community representatives to attend.

Program development – Link people helped promoting calls for expression of interest in the Chronic Conditions program and identifying participants to take part in industry roundtables – especially the Social and Emotional Well Being roundtable.

Keeping the CRAH community informed – a large amount of information dissemination in the CRAH is done through Link people. In 2006 a fortnightly e-bulletin was distributed through Link people, in addition to information disseminated through emails and meetings.

Promoting the CRCAH – each Link person promotes the CRCAH through networks in their partner organisation and with local stakeholders and community organisations. Promotion activities vary from person to person - in 2006, these included organising local meetings, arranging for CRCAH staff to present to students, developing a brochure to promote the CRCAH and Indigenous health staff, and a CRCAH display booth at the Darwin Show.

3. Link Person Survey

In 2006 the CRCAH Link people completed a survey to help staff to reflect on the Link role and identify areas to improve the support for Link people. The survey comprised 17 questions which focused on three main areas: the Link role, in-kind, and communications.

Twenty-five Link people were asked to complete an online survey and sixteen (64%) responses were received. A third of the respondents (37.5 %,) identified as Indigenous and most worked in research organisations, followed by government and then community controlled health organisations.

3.1 The Link role

Half of the respondents have been Link people for less than a year. Only 3 respondents have been a Link person for more than two years

Half of respondents spend between 1 and 3 hours per week on Link activities. Only 2 spent more than 10 hours per week.

The three main activities undertaken are disseminating CRCAH information, In-Kind data collection and reporting, networking, and attending CRCAH related meetings.

The majority reported that they were informed about the CRCAH, and felt supported and valued in their role as a Link person.

Most Link people did not regularly liaise with their Board member.

Successes include:

- getting projects endorsed as in-kind, assisting people to attend the symposium, supporting researchers in linking with community, disseminating information about the CRCAH, supporting students and getting them interested in research in Indigenous issues.

Challenges include:

- busy workloads of Link people and the staff they are liaising with, difficulties understanding and explaining the CRCAH, competing priorities or loyalties and difficulty engaging others in the CRCAH because it is so different to traditional organisations

Benefits include:

- the development of networking, skills collaboration, partnerships, event organisation, report writing, teamwork, negotiation, learning more about Aboriginal health research and the opportunity to connect up with people with a range of ideals and views

“I have had surprising success in my role with my organisation’s staff. The majority of staff that I have been in contact with have been very eager to become involved and have been very supportive of my role.”

“I am inspired by the CRCAH staff & enjoy working with them because they are a resilient mob of people who can always manage a laugh at the end of the day. They build the most amazing bridges between people and I enjoy working on their construction sites wherever they are in Australia. “

“There has been a great deal of difficulty in clearly explaining the manner in which the CRCAH functions to others. Because it is SO different to other research organisations it does not fit into the paradigms that others in my field expect to see.”

3.2 In-kind projects and collection of in-kind data

In Kind is seen as an important part of the Link person role. Over 80% of respondents report to understand in-kind and the value of collecting in-kind information

Benefits of in-kind activities include:

- being aware of the amount of work being done by their organisation in Aboriginal health research, strengthening relationships, funding parts of projects that would not be funded elsewhere, valuing community members contribution to projects, presentations of in-kind work at CRCAH forums and promotion of projects

Challenges in identifying and collecting in-kind include:

- feeling responsible for an organisation’s in-kind contribution, limited staff time to put forward in-kind projects and contribute to in-kind collection of data, confusion about what it means to have a project endorsed as in-kind and what information is to be collected, and divided loyalties between a funder and that CRCAH for in-kind projects

“Discussing and collecting in-kind contributions with staff members has actually surprisingly strengthened relationships.”

“A community member who worked on a project was able to participate in a presentation of the project at a CRC forum, make links with researchers and as a result seriously consider further involvement in research higher degree study.”

“The activity creates a central knowledge management system for my organisation to understand the contribution it is making to Indigenous research.”

“It’s about joining the dots, connecting people with people through their particular fields of work.”

3.3 CRCAH communication mechanisms

Link people meetings, Link Role Statement, The Bulletin, the website, newsletter, Annual Report, promotional brochures, research reports and discussion papers, Convocation/Symposium, Showcases, and workshops and seminars found to generally to be useful

Suggestions for improvements or additions to the CRCAH communication mechanisms include:

- more clarity in communications, more promotion of CRCAH and its partners’ research, more notice with invitations, appropriate visits to community and organisations.

Suggestions on how the CRCAH could provide better support to Link people include:

- visits from CRCAH representatives, brochures, keeping Link people in the loop, research leadership development, Link workshops, and administrative support

“When new research reports & discussion papers are released, please ensure the link people get hard copies to distribute and keep track of. Also, maybe some tips as to how & where to distribute these. There may be particular organisations that the CRCAH would like to link up with...link people may be able to create the opportunity”

“It is so helpful to hear about projects at Link meetings that I think it would help the CRCAH as a whole to have more information circulating about projects.”

“I think the link role is very important and provides us with an excellent opportunity to promote the CRCAH more widely than only the partners themselves.”