

Closing the Gap: Enhancing Community Engagement in Rural Healthcare Planning in British Columbia

BACKGROUND

Rural communities in British Columbia (BC) face healthcare challenges that are different from the challenges in urban areas. Healthcare planning and policies often privilege health services in urban areas, resulting in an imbalance of population health and lack of access to services in rural communities. In addition, there are a lack of well-established processes for community engagement in British Columbia, resulting in centralized, urban-based decision-making that may not meet the needs of rural communities. To address this disparity, the UBC Centre for Rural Health Research (CRHR) and the BC Rural Health Network (BCRHN) are conducting a Gap Analysis study funded by the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of BC. The purpose of this study is to understand and document rural residents' and communities' experiences of engagement with health care decision-making.

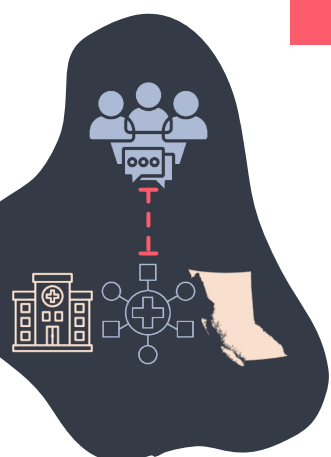
PURPOSE

The purpose of this gap analysis is to understand and address the gap between outputs of rural, community-oriented voice relating to policy and decision-making and its uptake in health planning at the regional and provincial levels.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study is to understand the factors influencing the inclusion of rural community voice in healthcare planning. We will do this by:

- Understanding the role of community voice in policy making at regional and provincial levels of government,
- Understanding the current gaps between rural community engagement and uptake of rural community voice in regional and provincial health planning.
- Identifying what strategies are currently used to include rural community voices in policy making, and understanding the factors influencing these processes.
- Developing strategies to close the gaps.



RESEARCH METHODS

To understand the gaps between current policy practice and optimal inclusion of community voice, the research team will employ a two-pronged approach. First, qualitative interviews will be conducted via Zoom with policy makers from the Ministry of Health and Regional Health Authorities as well as rural community leaders. Second, an electronic survey will be distributed through the Centre for Rural Health Research and the BC Rural Health Networks' communication and recruitment channels.

The interviews and survey responses will help us understand how community perspectives are currently included in policy making at the regional and provincial levels, identify optimal strategies for community engagement from the perspectives of both communities and policy makers, better understand the experiences of rural community leaders in influencing policy, and recognize rural community members' perceptions about their involvement in health care planning.



ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

This study is the first step to bridge the gap between rural community voices and rural health policy in BC. Understanding and addressing this disconnect is a crucial step towards fostering a more inclusive, representative, and effective health policy-making process in BC. The findings from this study will be used to create recommendations for an enhanced community participation in rural areas of BC. This, in turn, will support improved health outcomes for rural communities. Ultimately, our goal is to increase the inclusion of rural community voice, empower rural residents, and ensure that health care policies and planning serve the needs of rural communities in BC.

LEARN MORE

For more information about this study, contact the Research Coordinator Kate Wills, kate.wills@ubc.ca.

FUNDING

The project received a grant from the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of British Columbia.



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