

Community Advisory Committee Meeting 1/2019

Wednesday 27 February 2019, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Boardroom

Monash School of Rural Health

Latrobe Regional Hospital campus and by Zoom video conferencing

Meeting Notes

1. Welcome and Apologies

Chair:

Ms Carolyne Boothman

Community members:

Mr Geoff Duffell, Mr Shane Wilson, Ms Vicki Hamilton OAM, Ms Denise Collis

Organisational representatives:

Associate Professor Kate Moore, Ms Ellen-Jane Browne, Cr Kellie O’Callaghan, Mr Mark Biggs

Ex Officio:

Professor Michael Abramson (Principle Investigator) and Professor Judi Walker (Principle Co-Investigator Gippsland)

Hazelwood Health Study Personnel:

Ms Melissa Peppin (Administrative Officer)

Apologies:

Ms Sharon Houlihan, Ms Ruth Churchill

2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

No new member conflicts of interest were noted.

3. CAC Community Membership and Election of an Independent Chair

The Hazelwood Health Study opened a call for new community members to join the Community Advisory Committee in late November 2018. Three applications were received. The applications were reviewed by a selection committee, and all three applicants had their applications approved.

This brings the total number of community members to four people. The terms of reference allow for up to 6 community members from Latrobe City and up to 4 community members from the wider Gippsland region. The committee agreed that recruitment will be ongoing until all vacancies have been filled.

As per the terms of reference, the Independent Chair must be sourced from among the community members. The committee agreed to delay the election of an independent Chair and deputy Chair until more community members have been recruited.

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4. Dissemination of findings

Prof Judi Walker provided a brief overview on the timetable for dissemination of findings, noting that there were several papers that have been submitted to DHHS and are waiting public dissemination in the next month. A copy of the report was circulated prior to the meeting.

5. New release of findings

Prof Walker gave a brief overview of the recent results from the ELF and Schools Study streams.

5.1 The Latrobe ELF Study – Exposure to mine fire smoke and the risk of pregnancy-related health problems

The committee was informed that the report has now been finalised and submitted to the DHHS for approval. The HHS is expecting this to be ready for release in the coming weeks. Dr Shannon Melody addressed the CAC meeting in December 2018 to discuss the preliminary results for the ELF stream, and the committee expressed interest in having Dr Melody return to provide an update on the research.

5.2 Schools Study – The ongoing experiences of students following the Hazelwood mine fire

The study assessed the psychological impacts of six weeks of exposure to smoke and ash from the Hazelwood mine fire on school aged children. 46 students in grades 5, 7, and 9 were interviewed for round two of the Schools Study in late 2017. The study compared students from schools in the most exposed community (Morwell) with those from schools elsewhere in the Latrobe Valley which were less exposed to the smoke event. The analysis found that students still had vivid recall of the event with most recalling being anxious or sick at the time. While most reported little to no ongoing concerns, some did report ongoing issues. This includes dreaming about the event, feeling more restless, or trying to avoid thinking about it by distracting themselves with other activities. Prof Walker noted that the analysis of round two survey data is still being finalised, which will provide clearer insight into the level of distress being reported by these students, but it is still clear that the majority of students are not reporting issues.

6. Study Status Report

Prof Michael Abramson provided a PowerPoint presentation of the progress of the Hazelwood Health Study to date. This included a view of where we are at, and what answers we have to the research questions thus far.

The committee queried whether there were any plans to investigate the health effects of exposure to other chemicals, such as PM₁₀, CO, API, NO₂, NO_x, O₃ and SO₂. Prof Abramson said that as there is only limited data available on other pollutants, it would be difficult to accurately model the effects of these chemicals on the health of the community. For example, high spatial resolution estimates of CO are available, but are highly collinear with PM_{2.5} results. A cumulative PM_{2.5} metric based on concentrations modelled by CSIRO and time local diaries will be used to assess exposure.

7. MAC Report

The Ministerial Advisory Committee provided an Interim Report to the Minister in September 2018, which was accepted in December. The report provided advice to the Minister on Methodology, Governance and Communication and suggested three 'Future Actions'. In response to the MAC Report, Minister Mikakos has asked the HHS to work with the Department and the MAC to implement three recommendations:

1. Appoint an expert to the Scientific Reference Group who is independent from Monash University and the Long Term Health Study.
2. Expand the Revised Project Plan due in July 2019 to undertake a strategic overview of the HHS and advise the department on what the overall study findings mean for the health of the Latrobe Valley community and the future scope of the study.
3. The department to facilitate an integrated communication plan working with the HHS and other community groups and organisations.

The committee acknowledged the importance of looping the HHS into meetings with other stakeholders in the Latrobe Valley health sector, such as the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone, the Latrobe Health Assembly and the Latrobe Health Advocate.

8. Strategic Overview/Community Consultation

Prof Walker invited the committee to provide their feedback on developing the HHS revised project plan due in July, and the committee discussed current challenges facing the study that they identified, including:

- Relationships with other stakeholders in the Latrobe Valley health sector
- Communication and dissemination of findings to the local community
- Building trust and a good relationship between the community and the HHS

The committee workshopped different ideas that could be implemented to address the above challenges, including creating an online safe space to allow people to discuss their experiences of the Hazelwood Mine Fire; allowing DHHS to coordinate 'four corner' meetings with key stakeholders in the healthcare space and inviting researchers from the HHS to talk with community stakeholder groups.

Above all, a key concern raised was the trust the community held for the HHS. Community members explained that there is a lot of mistrust in the community due to a history of unmet promises by various organisations. The committee also noted that for many members of the community who are unwell, there is an innate need to search for reasons as to why they are sick. As such, even if the results from the HHS show that there are no adverse health effects, there will be community members who will not accept this due to anecdotal evidence or their personal experience. The committee recommended giving ownership of the HHS and its findings to the community, and to reimagine how the results are disseminated.

The committee required additional time to discuss the strategic overview, and requested an extraordinary meeting to be held in April to workshop more ideas.

Action item: Organise extraordinary meeting to be held in April to workshop further ideas

9. Annual CAC Performance Review

Melissa provided a breakdown of the review and responded to feedback. The performance review, completed by 7 members of the committee, assessed a number of areas, including how the committee operates, how well the committee performs its roles and the chairing of the committee. Overall, the feedback indicated the need to increase community membership on the CAC to ensure the committee is able to hear from a range of perspectives and meet its functions and obligations. Professor Walker acknowledged that this is an issue we are aware of and are actively working to overcome.

10. Review of Terms of Reference

The committee was presented with a revised Terms of Reference for the CAC that reflected feedback sourced from the Committee in the December meeting. The committee provided additional feedback, such as the need for the specific role of the CAC to focus on retention, rather than recruitment of study participants, and the need to identify the specific role of a Deputy Chair in the Terms of Reference. It was agreed that the Terms of Reference would be revised with the additional feedback and circulated to the committee prior to the next meeting.

Action item: Remove focus on recruitment protocols and replace this with a focus on retaining stud participants

Action item: Include a process for annual election of Deputy Chair

Action item: Circulate ToR to committee prior to next meeting

11. 2019 Meeting Dates

It was decided that the April meeting would be an extraordinary committee meeting that would be held in a workshop format instead of a regular meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to reflect on where the HHS is going and provide feedback to the strategic overview.

Action item: Circulate 2019 meeting dates to the committee

12. Other Business

10.1 Engie Email

The Hazelwood Health Study was contacted by the Communications Manager at the ENGIE Hazelwood Rehabilitation Project to query whether the CAC would be interested in arranging a briefing between the Demolition Manager and Environmental Manager and the HHS Community Advisory Committee.

The committee thanked the organisation for their efforts to brief them, however, noted that this was not within the scope of the committees responsibilities, and therefore is not appropriate. Members of the committee noted that they have attended similar briefing sessions as individual members of the community and are familiar with the project proposals.

10.2 Five Year Anniversary Event

Carolyn Boothman informed the committee that there will be an event held on Sunday 24 March at the Latrobe Regional Gallery to commemorate the 5 year anniversary of the end of the mine fire.

HHS will be participating in the event by providing the photos from the Our Hopes for the Future of Morwell exhibition to be displayed during the event.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm.