



COORDINARE

Community Interviewers' and
Project Team's Experiences
and Insights/Telehealth

November 2020

Disclaimer

Inherent Limitations

This report has been prepared as outlined in the Introduction section. The report is solely for the purpose and use of COORDINARE, South Eastern NSW PHN.

The report has been prepared through a process outlined in the Introduction section of this report. ConNetica has relied upon the information obtained through the project as being accurate and ConNetica has not undertaken any auditing or other forms of testing to verify accuracy, completeness or reasonableness of the information provided or obtained. Accordingly, ConNetica can accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions in the information provided shown in this report based upon information provided.

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Consultant

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1. Introduction

COORDINARE is committed to better understanding the experience of digital/telehealth from the consumer viewpoint. To this end, COORDINARE undertook a project to:

- 1) Gain insight into consumer understanding and experience of digital/telehealth to advocate for system improvement.
- 2) Inform potential opportunities for PHN to work with service providers to tailor more accessible telehealth services, and
- 3) Inform PHN commissioning approaches in relation to various targeted commissioning activities.

During the project design phase, it was decided that local community members (Community Interviewers) representing different community sectors and or health needs such as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- CALD community
- Older citizens
- Youth
- Families
- Regional and metropolitan locations
- Various Chronic illnesses

would be engaged to conduct community interviews. This approach was predicated on the hypothesis that:

- Community Interviewers from the above cohorts would have more access to readily arrange interviews with individuals from these diverse groups, and
- that those interviewed would be more willing to honestly share their thoughts with the Community Interviewers with whom they already had a trusted relationship.

Marion Wands, CEO & Director ConNetica was engaged to work with and support the project team and Community Interviewers, analyse and collate the interview findings and prepare two reports:

- Consumers' Experiences of Digital/Telehealth Health, and
- Community Interviewers' and Project Team's Experiences and Insights/Telehealth.

Eight Community Interviewers were engaged in the project. The table below provides the geographical locations of the Community Interviewers and the cohort they represented.

| Geographical Location | Cohort represented | Gender |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Moruya | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | Female |
| Wollongong | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | Male |
| Goulburn | Chronic Illness | Male |
| Yass | Families & Living with a disability | Female |
| Wollongong | Refugee | Female |
| Wollongong | Refugee | Female |

| | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------|
| Bega | Youth | Female |
| Bermagui | Chronic Illness | Female |

The purpose of this report is to detail the Community Interviewers' and Project Team's insights and experiences in relation to this innovative approach to data collection to determine the efficacy of this approach for future data collection requirements.

2. Findings

2.1 Interviewers' Experience and Insights

Engaging local community members

- There was unanimous support amongst the interviewees that the engagement of local community members increased broader community members willingness to be interviewed and share their thoughts as they had an existing relationship with the interviewer, as one Community Interviewer shared:
 - *This grass roots and non-threatening approach enabled the collection of rich data.*
 - Some interviewees shared that if they had received a “cold call” to participate they would have declined, however because they know and trust the interviewer, they were happy to be involved.
 - Community interviewers expressed sincere gratitude to the interviewees who were generous in providing their time and the depth of their responses to the interview questions.
 - *It is important to acknowledge how generous people were with providing their time and responses. I made myself available for as long as the interviewees wanted.*
 - Many community members thought it was encouraging that local community members could undertake this research and be paid for their services, some were also interested in becoming community interviewers.
 - Interviewers valued the opportunity to be more engaged in the well-being of their community, to learn the views of community members and to reconnect with past acquaintances who they interviewed.
 - Interviewers became more cognisant of different community members' views because of the diversity of the interviewers and interviewees involved in the process.
 - *Community interviewing is very valuable.*
 - *It was good to:*
 - *learn different perspectives from the interviewers and interviewees.*
 - *connect with other interviewers who I did not know and to share our learnings and insights.*
 - *see that those involved value differences, and this added more worth to the project.*

Demographic questions

- Interestingly, even though relationships exist between the interviewers and interviewees it was noted that some interviewees were reluctant to share details around their demographics with the Community Interviewer. To overcome this reluctance, it was agreed that demographic related questions would be best placed at the conclusion of the interview as the interviewee will be more relaxed and have confidence in the process.
- *There is still stigma around mental illness and even though we told interviewees that their responses would remain confidential, some interviewees were reluctant to provide the mental health related details.*
- There was a need to include additional demographics to capture a person's socio demographic profile and if they were a single parent. The former was especially important as this provided insight into the potential impediment of being unable to afford the costs associated with accessing digital health services.
- Age ranges would be more useful than a simple classification of youth and older person.
- In relation to responding to the question "do you have a mental illness" it is more likely that interviewees would better respond to:
 - "Are there times in your life when you live with a mental illness or have a mental health concern? or
 - Are there occasions when you feel depressed or anxious?"

The latter would be more appropriate as some people experience periodic anxiety and depression which they do not see as a mental illness.

Arranging interview times

- Community interviewers realised that they needed to be more direct in arranging interview times with their interviewees.
- Respecting the interviewees' time was deemed important and meeting times needed to best suit the needs of the interviewer and the interviewee.

Questions

- Some interviewers shared that some interview questions seemed repetitive in nature. It was also requested that in the future questions only address one issue, to ensure that interviewees are clear on what is being asked.
- In relation to the identification of positive and negative experiences relating to COVID it would have been useful to ask interviewees to share three positive and three negative experiences so that the conversation could be more focused

Interview Process

- The interview process became easier as interviewers' confidence and knowledge of the questions increased. Interviewers became more willing to further explore interviewees responses by asking additional probing questions to gather more in-depth information.
- *I became more confident and would have been happy to do more interviews. In fact, as more community members found out about the process, they expressed an interest in being interviewed by me.*

- *I further improved my interviewing skills as a result of my engagement in this project.*
- By ensuring that the person understood the question, the interviewee was able to provide more detailed responses.
- *I asked the question in different ways, to ensure interviewees understood its intent and were able to share their thoughts.*
- The open-ended questions helped to ensure issues were more broadly explored.
- Given the impact of COVID - 19 it was appreciated that the interviews could be conducted via digital means for face to face.

Question Guide

- This was appreciated and found useful in preparing for the interviews.
- *I would strongly recommend that future Community Interviewer projects include the Interview Guide that details the questions, their intent and prompts. This was really useful.*

Project Administration

- Access to an Interviewer's Pack from the beginning of the process and early notice of meeting dates, agendas and zoom links helped the interviewers to effectively perform their role.
- *From an administration perspective this project was very well managed*
- The Community interviewers' timely return of completed interviewee reports helped to ensure that project timelines were met.

Question Sheets for CALD Interviewees

- Preparing question sheets in advance of the interviews that are in the language of the cohort being interviewed would be advantageous.
- *Having a question sheet in one's language, that the interviewee can "look at and hold" during the interview would build their confidence in the interview process and preparedness to participate.*
- Being able to ask the questions in one's language and use suitable words increased the relevance of the questions for the interviewees and their willingness to participate.

Support and Follow Up

- Some interviewees shared that they appreciated being contacted during the interview timeframe to see how they were progressing and to offer help if required. It was noted that even though help was not needed it was reassuring to know that back up support was available, as this strengthened confidence in the process.
- *I knew if I needed support, it was available.*

Transparency

- Interviewers expressed appreciation of the genuine opportunity to review, discuss and ensure the accuracy of analysed data and draft reports and to have input into report recommendations.
- The inclusion of interviewers' and interviewees' quotes demonstrated that the input of those involved was valued and valuable.

- *It was good to see that the report included quotes from a variety of those involved.*
- *The quotes made the report more real and validated our involvement and that of the interviewees.*

Personal Learning

Interviewers were unanimous in appreciating being a part of this process. They valued the opportunity to be Community Interviewers, to learn more about telehealth and the views of other community members. Some commented that they were surprised by the interviewees' positive telehealth experiences.

- *It was good to learn more about telehealth.*
- *Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this project.*
- *I would like to be involved in this sort of project again.*
- *The skills I learnt are valuable for and relevant to the job I currently perform / study I am undertaking.*
- *The sum is always greater than the parts.*

Sharing Report Findings

- There was unanimous agreement that the final reports be:
 - shared with all interviewees involved in the project to show that their views were listened to and included in the report, and
 - placed on the COORDINARE website to help others to learn:
 - ways to improve access to and the quality of digital and telehealth services,
 - how to effectively engage Community Interviewers, and
 - benefits of engaging Community Interviewers.
- *Aboriginal people are amongst the most researched people in the world and often they never receive feedback on the outcomes of their input. It is really important that we provide them with access to this report.*
- *Access to this report on the web will be really useful. It's the sort of report that provides valuable findings that we can refer to/ incorporate in our assignments and day to day work.*

2.2 Project Consultant's Insights

Marion Wands, the consultant engaged throughout this project reported the following insights about the project's approach and impact.

Building Local Community Social Capital

- Increasing local community members' capacity to undertake interviews with community members has resulted in numerous benefits, including:
 - Building and consolidating connections between community members

- Increasing recognition of and valuing of community diversity, critical attributes underpinning inclusive and supportive communities
- Increasing knowledge and skills of community members
- Providing employment opportunities for local community members, and therefore increasing retention of project related funds in participating communities
- Retaining and extending telehealth knowledge and community interviewing skills in local communities that can be utilised in future projects
- Reducing the cost of future research projects and therefore being able to potentially conduct more grass roots community research projects
- Affirming the skills that exist in local communities
- Increasing the ability of communities to understand and address issues directly relevant to their context
- Demonstrating confidence in community's ability to manage their affairs in ways that best suit their needs – *“local solutions aligned to local needs”*

Personal Satisfaction

The consultant greatly valued the ability to share her expertise with the interviewers and to offer support as needed. Her personal commitment to building local capacity and “working with rather than on” people fully aligned with the intent of the project and resulted in high levels of personal job satisfaction.

Preparation and Process

The following actions further supported effective engagement of the Community Interviewers:

- Paying interviewers for their time
- Using existing networks to locate and invite interviewers, which further consolidated community engagement throughout the project
- Engaging a cross section of Community Interviewers who have existing relationships with cohorts from whom feedback is often difficult to obtain
- Reassuring interviewers that involvement was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time
- Emphasising the confidential nature of the interviews
- Acknowledging existing skills amongst the interviewers
- Nondefensively responding to interviewers' feedback in relation to ways to improve the overall process
- Preparing the interview guide and interview tip sheet
- Following up interviewers in a respectful manner and offering support if required
- Providing details re external support, if interviewers or interviewees became distressed during the process
- Conducting three Zoom meetings to provide opportunities for codesign, clarification of findings and input to and sign off on the final report. These actions demonstrated that interviewers' input was genuinely valued and maximised their engagement throughout the process and acceptance of and confidence in the validity of the final reports.