

# Chapter 5: Achievement of intermediate-level objectives relating to ongoing, self-sustained interdisciplinary clinical networks (Area B)

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## Objective B.1: Networks' structures and processes established

At the beginning of the MHPN project, there was an expectation about creating sustainable networks, but no specified model as to how these networks would be developed and maintained and no dedicated resources to support them. At this time the sustainability aspect of the project was supported by Project Officers who, undertaking the rollout of workshops, had many competing demands on their time.

As MHPN evolved, the need for greater focus on sustainability was acknowledged and a system of support for sustainable networks was developed at all levels, from governance through to MHPN staff. This took considerable time and resources to conceptualise and operationalise. In February 2010, the MHPN leadership group and Network Sustainability Project Officers met to review and refine processes to support the establishment of networks after it became clear that there were increasing demands from network groups for administrative support, leadership and strategic planning. In March 2010, MHPN conducted five network co-ordinator forums involving 49 co-ordinators in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. Participants from various professional groups got together at these forums to provide feedback about the barriers and enablers to sustainable networks. This information was used to improve MHPN's resources and systems for supporting ongoing networks.

## Objective B.2: Resources to support ongoing networks developed

In September 2009, MHPN signed an agreement with the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) which enabled some funding to be redirected to provide \$500 per network to support sustainability. Focus on sustainability in workshop delivery and communication began, and in November 2009 development of resources to support ongoing networks commenced. These resources included a 'next steps' guide and co-ordinators' kit, designed to assist network co-ordinators with developing and maintaining networks. These resources were distributed to all network co-ordinators.

## Objective B.3: Resources to support ongoing networks delivered

As noted earlier, from October 2009 until June 2010, only one Project Officer in each MHPN team was dedicated to supporting the sustainability of networks. It was not until the beginning of July 2010, when MHPN shifted its emphasis from delivering workshops to fostering networks, that full MHPN resources were directed into sustainability. At this time, *all* Project Officers became Network Sustainability Project Officers whose role was to assist with sustainability. These individuals focused on the issue of sustainability and assisted in the development and continuation of ongoing networks. Their role was to build relationships with and to support network co-ordinators, with the ultimate aim of building viable sustainable networks. This role included developing promotional strategies to suit different networks, providing advice about continuing professional development accreditation and promoting MHPN's resources (e.g., the \$500 funding opportunity), helping networks to define their purpose, providing administrative support to networks, and promoting MHPN's web portal.

## Objective B.4: Barriers and enablers to network participation and co-ordination identified and addressed

Combined data from MHPN’s workshop master list dataset, workshop calendar dataset and workshop attendance dataset offer some clues as to the barriers and enablers to developing sustainable ongoing networks. Table 12 shows the findings from a logistic regression analysis that considered the relationship between a number of workshop-related variables and the likelihood of members of a workshop forming a network. It includes data from 899 workshops for which data on all variables was available.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, each variable was considered in isolation. By far the greatest predictor of a workshop forming a network was workshop members agreeing to meet again (OR = 123.42; 95%CI = 28.78-529.27). Facilitator agreement to continue involvement as a network co-ordinator was also significant (OR = 4.12; 95%CI = 2.73-6.22). Rural workshops were also more likely to lead to networks (OR = 1.63; 95%CI = 1.02-2.59). Subsequently, each variable was considered in the context of all other variables in the model. The intention of workshop members to meet again continued to show a statistically significant association with network formation (OR = 74.66; 95%CI = 17.00-327.78), as did the ongoing involvement of the workshop facilitator as a network co-ordinator (OR = 2.60; 95%CI = 1.64-4.14). However, when the other variables were taken into account, rural workshops were no more likely than urban workshops to generate networks. Introducing a more conservative split for number of general practitioners in the workshop (e.g., 0-1 versus ≥2) did not influence these findings.

**Table 12: Workshop-related predictors of ongoing network formation**

|   |       | Network formed |     | Unadj. OR (95%CI)     | P     | Adj. OR (95%CI) | P     |
|---|-------|----------------|-----|-----------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
|   |       | No             | Yes |                       |       |                 |       |
| Location of workshop  | Urban | 83             | 532 | 1.00                  | 0.039 | 1.00            | 0.416 |
|   | Rural | 26             | 267 | 1.63 (1.02-2.59)      |       |                 |       |
| Facilitator to continue involvement as network co-ordinator | No    | 60             | 181 | 1.00                  | 0.000 | 1.00            | 0.000 |
|   | Yes   | 49             | 609 | 4.12 (2.73-6.22)      |       |                 |       |
| Agreed to meet again  | No    | 26             | 2   | 1.00                  | 0.000 | 1.00            | 0.000 |
|   | Yes   | 83             | 788 | 123.42 (28.78-529.27) |       |                 |       |
| Number of general practitioners in workshop                 | 0-2   | 45             | 318 | 1.00                  | 0.837 | 1.00            | 0.693 |
|   | ≥3    | 64             | 472 | 1.04 (0.70-1.57)      |       |                 |       |
| Number of different professional groups in workshop         | 1-2   | 7              | 57  | 1.00                  | 0.763 | 1.00            | 0.968 |
|   | ≥3    | 102            | 733 | 0.88 (0.39-1.99)      |       |                 |       |

*Source: MHPN’s master list dataset, workshop calendar dataset and workshop attendance dataset*

<sup>8</sup> It was necessary to have complete data on all of the variables included in the regression analysis. Complete data on all variables were available for 899 workshops (78% of the total of 1,156 workshops reported elsewhere). In total, 88% of these workshops generated ongoing networks. In comparison, 81% of the 1,156 workshops generated ongoing networks.

The above finding was broadly consistent with the results of the sustainability focus group, but with some nuances. MHPN Network Sustainability Project Officers and Senior Project Officers who took part in this focus group highlighted the importance of having a strong co-ordinator to show leadership, noting that the facilitator was often well-placed to take on this role. They also flagged that the dynamics of the workshop group influenced their desire to continue to meet. These themes are explored in more detail below, along with an additional theme brought up by focus group participants in the context of their discussing barriers and enablers to network formation: the purpose and format of network meetings.

### ***Network co-ordination***

Most participants in the sustainability focus group agreed that the key to ongoing networks presently was the presence of a '*champion co-ordinator*', an individual who was a '*good leader*' who was '*respected*' and had '*skill, competency, time, effort*'. Mention was made of the fact that some workshop facilitators were in a position to command this sort of respect when they had positive motivations and the appropriate skills to lead the group. Participants noted, however, that there were risks that this person could get '*overwhelmed*' and '*burnt out*' and that a model of shared co-ordination by a number of individuals was likely to be more sustainable in the long term, but that this also presented challenges in terms of individuals working effectively together. Participants also spoke about the difficulties in finding appropriate individuals to be involved in network coordination, noting that a lack of '*skills and competencies*' in a co-ordinator can be a barrier to creating successful ongoing networks.

### ***Dynamics of workshop group***

Sustainability focus group participants commented that the characteristics of network members were both a potential barrier and a potential enabler to successful ongoing networks. Some commented, for example, that success or failure was determined by the level of enthusiasm of members of given initial workshops. Participants reported that having local groups of providers who were already networking involved in workshops could act as an enabler by providing networking structures and fostering enthusiasm, but might also have the reverse effect if these local groups of providers had pre-existing agendas, factions and/or tensions. Participants also commented that the mix of professionals both at the workshops and in the networks was also seen as a key factor that could enable or stifle ongoing networks; on the one hand, sustainability focus group participants spoke of desire from many mental health professionals to have a range of providers involved (particularly general practitioners), and on the other hand they noted the challenges in dealing with interdisciplinary tensions.

### ***Purpose and format of network meetings***

A number of sustainability focus group participants noted that a key influence on the success of ongoing networks was the format of the network meetings. Participants agreed that networks that had a clear purpose and clearly set out their topics and meeting dates in advance were more successful because this allowed professionals to plan ahead and attend meetings that were of interest to them. Participants also reported that capitalizing on the groups' expertise when deciding on meeting topics was useful. They also agreed that constant communication with network members between meetings was crucial.

## Objective B.5: Co-ordination and support of networks provided by MHPN

The sustainability and website survey asked respondents to consider what kind of support from MHPN might be required for the establishment of ongoing networks. Specifically, it asked them to rank a series of potential support options in order of importance. Table 13 shows that, overwhelmingly, respondents thought that MHPN should 'Provide financial incentives' – 85% of respondents listed this as their first choice and 10% as their second. This prioritisation was consistent across urban and rural respondents and across professional groups.

**Table 13: Workshop attendees' views of the support required from MHPN for the establishment of ongoing networks**

| If MHPN were to continue its activities, how could they support the establishment of ongoing networks?                                   |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | Ranked as 1 <sup>st</sup> most important form of support | Ranked as 2 <sup>nd</sup> most important form of support |
| Provide financial incentives   | 85.3%  | 10.2%  |
| Assist with developing a network meeting calendar of events  | 7.1%   | 11.6%  |
| Pay for experts to attend meetings to present of their area of expertise   | 4.4%   | 20.1%  |
| Provide meetings for network co-ordinators from different locations  | 2.9%   | 2.3%   |
| Provide learning materials about network co-ordination   | 0.3%   | 3.5%   |
| Provide venue support  | -  | 10.8%  |
| Provide information regarding educational opportunities offered by other organisations that are relevant for network members             | -  | 8.6%   |
| Provide access to online resources   | -  | 8.2%   |
| Have a contact staff member within MHPN to assist with co-ordination of emails and other modes of communication with the network members | -  | 8.2%   |
| Provide catering for meetings  | -  | 7.1%   |
| Provide a network starter kit containing resources suggesting how the network might function   | -  | 5.6%   |
| Assist networks to define their purpose  | -  | 3.8%   |

Source: Sustainability and website survey

Sustainability focus group participants also spoke about the key role of the MHPN in contributing to network success. Many of the participants reported that without the involvement of the MHPN the networks would flounder. Participants reported that networks often sought guidance from the MHPN regarding network meeting purpose, format and content, and that provision of this guidance was a key enabler of network success. Participants spoke of the capacity of the MHPN to assist networks with administrative tasks (e.g., communicating with network members, organising meeting venues, managing meeting invitations and acceptances); many participants saw this as a key role of the MHPN in enabling networks. Participants also viewed the practical resources provided by MHPN as enablers. In particular, they discussed the potential of MHPN Online, commenting on its ability to assist professionals to become more aware of networks, and to assist members who might be unable or unwilling to attend network meetings.

Having identified the above enablers, participants cited a range of barriers faced by MHPN in providing optimal support to networks. The first of these was staffing levels, which they saw as limiting their capacity to support

emerging networks. The second was MHPN's own lack of clarity about how best to support networks; participants spoke of their frustration in not being able to give networks clear guidance and instruction regarding what would make a successful network. The third perceived barrier was their inability to provide networks with assurances about the longevity of MPH N which they felt jeopardised potential network likelihood of engagement.