**Abstract submitted for the 5th NSW Rural Health and Research Congress**

**Twin Towns,Tweed Heads 9 - 11 November 2016**

**Congress Stream:** No 6 Integrated care and partnerships: rethinking relationships

**Alternate Stream:** No 2 Innovation in health care: the lived experience

**Abstract Title:** Paramedic Connect – Community Health

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**Background**

The health outcomes are poorer in regional Australia and have subsequently higher health needs. Reduced health access through shortages and maldistribution of the health workforce creates a regional health care gap. Paramedics already assigned to these areas could be key to increasing health care access to vulnerable populations.

**Approach**

Through integration and partnerships with local health practitioners, paramedics can provide or assist in community health education or activities. Education includes community and school group talks, demonstrations and newspaper articles. Community health activities involve health checks on community members and regular general health and welfare checks of ‘at risk’ individuals. This is done in conjunction with referrals and monthly reviews at integrated health care meetings.

**Outcomes / Results**

At risk patients who were regularly visited by paramedics had a 54% reduction in incidents attended by NSW Ambulance.

Community education increased awareness of paramedics as a useful health care resource for the community as evidenced by a 13% increase in Triple Zero (000) calls.

Paramedics followed an assistance or referral pathway on more than a quarter of their regular visits. Ensuring health care issues were addressed early before they became a problem.

**Take Home Message**

Paramedics in regional locations are a valuable health care resource that could be better utilised to bridge the health care gap in their communities.

By involving paramedics in integrated partnerships, paramedics can develop and maintain better relationships with patients, the community and local health professionals.