**Abstract Submission for HETI 4th Rural Health and Research Congress**

**Congress Stream:** Aboriginal health – Closing the Gap / opening the connections

**Alternative Stream:** Mental health / drug and alcohol – a focus on recovery

**Abstract Title:** Did it ‘Break the Cycle’? The impact of community led programs which aimed to prevent drug and alcohol harms in two remote NSW communities.

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**Background**

“Bourke tops list: more dangerous than any country in the world [1].” The now infamous *Sydney Morning Herald* headline was widely publicised after the article was published in 2013. Despite the questionable claim, it managed to highlight one salient truth: the often ‘forgotten’ issue of rural drug and alcohol abuse and its relationship to crime and poverty.

From 2014 onwards, the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) has the unique opportunity of being invited by the Bourke and Brewarrina communities to form a collaborative research partnership to investigate a number of community driven programs, developed under the federally funded ‘Breaking the Cycle’ initiative, that aimed to reduce drug and alcohol harms.

**Approach**

This evaluation will use routinely collected data obtained from 2002-2014 for Bourke and Brewarrina to measure the impact of the programs in reducing drug and alcohol harms in both communities. Descriptive analyses will identify the most common incidents and their characteristics and a segmented regression analysis of an interrupted time series estimated the impact of the programs, with segments specified for pre (2002-2012) and post (2012-2014) the commencement of the programs. Lastly, a summary of program process data (e.g. intake data, attendances, evaluations, local media reports) will be conducted.

**Outcomes / Results**

The most common types of police incidents were: assault (both domestic violence-related and alcohol-related); break and enter and malicious damage to property. Persons of interest were male, with the average age of 24.3 years. The summary of programs highlighted the diverse range of community approaches that were implemented from 2012-2014, however gaps in program delivery according to the evidence were delineated. \*\*

**Take Home Message**

Implementing effective drug and alcohol programs is indeed very challenging in rural communities, despite the best intentions of the community and key stakeholders. This research highlights that developing robust community-researcher partnerships fostered during the planning and implementation phase is integral to improving the program design, evaluation methodology, and, ultimately, health and community outcomes for our rural communities.

*\*\*The research team are currently undertaking the segmented regression analysis to estimate the overall impact of the programs. This analysis will be completed prior to the HETI conference in November 2015. If we are accepted, we will forward you an updated abstract with up to date results.*

**References:**

**[1]** Olding, R. & Ralston N. (2013, 2 February). Bourke tops list: more dangerous than any country in the world. *Sydney Morning Herald,* retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/bourke-tops-list-more-dangerous-than-any-country-in-the-world-20130201-2dq3y.html>