**Abstract Submitted for the 4th NSW 2015 Rural Health and Research Congress**

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**Alternate Stream:** NA

**Abstract Title**: Engagement as a Catalyst: Developing an Evidence-Based Toolkit for Planning Rural and Remote Maternity Services

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**Background:** A large number of rural maternity services have closed across Australia in recent years resulting in adverse psychosocial and health consequences for women and babies. The Australian Rural Birth Index (ARBI) study developed an evidence-based Toolkit to assess and plan the appropriate level of maternity service for rural communities with populations 1,000 – 25,000. This presentation describes the engagement strategies used to translate our research findings into a practical Toolkit.

**Approach:** The study employed a mixed methods technique that combined mathematical modelling with four engagement strategies: building a cross-disciplinary research team; an Expert Advisory Group; fieldwork; and a full-day interactive workshop.

**Outcomes/Results:** The engagement processes led to the development of a planning tool that was actively shaped and endorsed by health service planners and experts. The Toolkit incorporates instructions for calculating the ARBI formula along with a guide to contextual and planning considerations.

**Take home message:** The ARBI project has developed a planning tool for rural and remote maternity services based on extensive engagement, fieldwork and research evidence. Research translation strategies were embedded into the project from the outset to support the adoption of research findings. This Toolkit will be a valuable resource for rural health planners.