**Abstract submitted for the 4th Rural Health and Research Congress**

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**Congress Stream:** 3. Social determinants of health in the bush- the changing landscape

**Alternate stream:** 5. Rural health research in practice – connecting for change

**Abstract title:** Physical and mental health of informal caregivers in northern regional New South Wales

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**Background**

Informal carers play a vital role in our society particularly in rural areas where options for health services are limited. Informal carers receive minimal support from organisations, financial assistance from the government, and burnout is commonly described as a problem in the literature.

**Approach**

A survey of informal carers designed as a pilot questionnaire was conducted with 225 participants from regional northern New South Wales. Questions on demographics, perceptions of health services, support groups, validated measures of mental and physical health (SF36, CESD and K10) were also used to assess the status of this group.

**Outcomes/results**

Most carers were female (86%), primary caregivers (83%) who resided with the care recipient (75%). Many respondents had low physical and mental health scores, the latter correlating with clinical levels of depression. Carer Support groups were seldom utilised (27%).

**Take home message**

* This cohort is a vulnerable group and without appropriate intervention and support experience poor health which may compound social and economic disadvantage.  Preventative health measures need to be put in place to alleviate vulnerability.
* A study with a larger sample size to better understand the interplay between geographic and other disadvantages is recommended to best advise rural policies for intervention.