To recap - Engagement and impact

Engagement - A process or pathway to knowledge mobilisation
"interaction between researchers and research end-users outside of academia, for the mutually beneficial transfer of knowledge, technologies, methods or resources"

Impact - Measurable 'real-world' effects of research
"...contribution that research makes to the economy, society, environment or culture, beyond the contribution to academic research."

May be quite different in Social Work and Human Services than other disciplines

the nature of social science research involves gradually reducing uncertainties in a field, removing unwarranted assumptions and documenting consequences of policy and practice – primarily reshapes understanding, rather than revealing discoveries

Types of impact

- Instrumental
  - cause & effect is clear – there are clear implementable findings
  - findings influence the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour

- Conceptual
  - the general messages from the research not specific findings that are influential
  - research contributes to the understanding policy issues, or effects on people, reframing debates and contributing ideas

- Capacity building
  - through technical and personal skill development, via training programs, practice guides
  - changes are made to practice

Development of 12 impact case studies

- Engagement activities & impact of a program of research
- Selected on basis of most productive researchers identified in scoping reviews
- Based on interviews with the researchers & documents

Formatted with common template, including
- Context – background/rationale for the research program
- Summary of impact
- Research underpinning impact
- Details of impact
- Engagement activities
- Research income
- Research outputs

Impact on social policy

Multiple target audiences - policy is made by interactive networks of policy actors

- "A Voice in a Chorus" towards change

- Influence on policy debates
  - [submissions to public enquiries – Fernandez Wood Commission, Healy Qld Child Protection Commission of Inquiry]
  - [briefings for advocacy groups or professional associations]
- Raising community awareness of social problem
  - [impact of domestic violence beyond ‘battered wife’]
  - [focus on rehabilitation beyond medical and deficit to strengths based and family approach]
- [attention to minority voiceless groups, CALD and LGBTI in aged care]
- [attempts to manage issue of funds as a taboo]
- [exposing institutional abuse of children in care]
- [Changes to public policy, through new programs or directions, changes to legislation, or regulations.]
- Priority shifts in expenditure profiles or quantifiable reallocation of non-profit or public budgets.
  - [Funding NGO new program Next Steps After Care]
  - [Way Qld govt approaches NDIS – Insertion of field of data re reunification on NSW child protection data base ]
  - [changes to way Enduring Power of Attorney enacted in Qld] [S2S program funding NSW I Care]

Impact on service delivery

- New practice or changes to service delivery by human service organisations or industry body improve outcomes
  - disability organisations changed structures and focus on practice leadership.
  - new manualized intervention to support families as part of rehabilitation
  - new strategies to support transition from care – training foster carers – career advice – raise awareness CP workers

- New knowledge disseminated and incorporated into practice, human service professionals improve client experiences or outcomes
  - Reasons why people don’t attend appointments
  - Practice tools - check list assessment of CALD clients in aged care
  - Training and resources – on line resources active support – professional development
  - LGBTI issues – website and resources re unconscious bias in aged care
  - Bootlist and website used across the sector
  - Guide to good group homes

Impact on clients, community members

- Not necessarily direct and rarely measured.
  - Community impact - Improved community well-being, inclusion, or community participation.
  - Client impact - Improved client knowledge, status, experience, or well-being [changes on level of Active Support in Group Homes]
  - Organisational impact – Improved democratic participation or service access.
  - Community engagement or involvement in research has improved.
Engagement examples - pathways to impact

- Multiple partners or audiences
  - Policy makers
  - Practitioners
  - Service providers
  - Advocacy organisations and peak bodies
  - People with power

- Multiple types of relationship
  - Advisory – on boards and committees – govt - ngos
  - Collaboration or co-production of research projects – funding - in-kind
  - Contracting or consultancy projects
  - Joint positions
  - Contract research or consulting
  - Strategic commissioning - building a research agenda together
  - One off – ad hoc around dissemination and influence

Strategies for Engagement

- Links to policy or professional networks
- Marketing and dissemination
  - Events – lectures, workshops, roundtables
  - Social media
  - Media
- Public advocacy, community action or activism - media releases, commentary
- Reports for industry
- Awards from industry for research or research activities
- Consumer partnerships/collaborations
- Research supervision and teaching influences future policy or practice

Impact case studies – messages to date

- Productive researchers externally oriented and highly engaged in policy and practice - linking with policy makers, service providers and practitioners
- Researchers with external influence generally have academic track record, recognition and credibility – each reinforce the other
- Impact deliberately planned, opportunistic or ad hoc
- Measuring impact is not straightforward
  - SW researchers need ways to document and verify research impact that are relevant to the discipline
- Capable of capturing the many and varied ways that research can influence policy and practice over time.

Discussion points

- Similarities and differences in gaining research impact in different fields of practice
- What were the main non-academic impacts of the research? Consider reach and significance
  - Reach beyond local and state to Australia-wide and internationally
  - Reach beyond your industry partners to other human service organisations
  - Significance – the intensity or scale of impact
- How long did it take for impacts to be noticeable and lasting?
- How did the researchers achieve these impacts? (e.g. engagement activities)
- How were (or could) the impacts be verified?
- What challenges did the researchers face in pursuing impact?
- What are some lessons for future researchers based on this case study?
- Researcher-lobby group alliances to promote change

But

- Impact is a long term proposition
- Requires long term and multiple faceted engagement
- Plan from the beginning
- Time consuming – different expertise – not necessarily valued in the past
- Not part of traditional researcher skill set
- Requires infrastructure – Universities and the profession
- Difficulties of defining social work research – often invisible – & often no defined social work occupational group in agencies

Thank you.