

A review of the injury prevention workforce in Western Australia

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Conference: The 14th Australasian Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference

Background

In Western Australia (WA), injury accounts for 10% of the total burden of disease¹ and approximately one in five people report an injury that requires professional treatment each year.² The injury prevention and safety promotion workforce are a primary point of contact for community injury prevention. Understanding their characteristics, their work focus and their professional needs can support future workforce planning and capacity building activities. To date there has been no statewide assessment undertaken to profile the injury prevention workforce in WA.

Aim

This study reviewed the scope of the current injury prevention workforce in WA, the challenges they face and the opportunities for capacity building.

Methods

In 2018, a mixed-methods study was completed to understand current work roles, challenges, priority issues, and capacity building opportunities within the injury prevention and safety promotion workforce in WA. An online cross-sectional survey was undertaken with those working in injury prevention and safety promotion (n=230). Twelve purposefully selected participants were interviewed about their experiences in the injury prevention and safety promotion sector. Univariate and bivariate analysis was used to analyse quantitative data. Qualitative data was thematically analysed using key domains of inquiry. Ethical approval was granted through the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee [RDHS-70-15].

Results

Survey participants were predominately female (82.0%), aged 40 years and older (66.1%), held tertiary qualifications (80.0%), employed full-time (55.6%), and focused one day per week (41.9%) on injury prevention and safety promotion work. Leading injury areas of focus were falls (38.5%), alcohol and other drugs (38.0%), injury in general (31.8%) and community safety (30.7%). Key challenges for the workforce were low injury topic knowledge amongst the community and sector awareness of injury prevention strategies. Qualitative interviews revealed individual, organisational and community level opportunities to build capacity within the workforce.

Discussion and conclusions

This research provides insights into the profile, characteristics and activities of the injury prevention workforce in WA. The workforce is diverse across disciplines and organisations, with varying challenges. Results highlight the need to regularly audit the injury prevention sector to determine its composition, activities, challenges and facilitators for best injury prevention practice. Building sector capacity can support injury prevention and safety promotion sector identity and positive population health outcomes.

How the research pushes the boundaries

This is the first research conducted in WA to understand the demographics, scope and priorities of the injury prevention workforce.

References

1. Epidemiology Branch. *Overview of the burden of disease in Western Australia 2011 #1*. (Department of Health WA, 2016).
2. Merema, M. & Radomiljac, A. *Health and Wellbeing of Adults in Western Australia 2017, Overview and Trends*. (Department of Health, Western Australia, 2018).