

Safe communities

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I HAVE A BONE TO PICK WITH YOU: THE CHALLENGE OF ADDRESSING DOG-RELATED INJURY IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

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Background Sarina, a rural community with a regional population of 12 000, is serviced by Mackay Safe Communities Network (MSCN). MSCN was established in 2000 to address high injury rates regionally. Dog-related injuries contribute to these rates, increasing with rurality, and disproportionately impacting on vulnerable populations (eg, children; elderly). An investigation into dog-related injuries in Sarina was initiated.

Aims/Objectives/Purpose The aim was to determine the incidence of roaming dogs and the prevalence of dog-related injuries.

Methods Data on dog-related injury presentations to Sarina Hospital was obtained from Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit. Discussions with local government determined dog registration rates and the workload of the dog catchment team. Focus groups (Indigenous residents; seniors; mothers with young children); key stakeholder interviews (health professionals; community workers; state government representatives); and a convenience survey were conducted to examine causes. A literature search was conducted to identify interventions implemented in rural communities aimed at reducing the injury risk associated with dogs.

Results/Outcome Fears about reporting roaming dogs, dog-related injuries and near attacks emerged through community consultations as a barrier to implementing a community-wide intervention. Community members held fears for dogs' wellbeing (particularly if the dog belonged to a friend or neighbour); and fears of reprisal from dog owners.

Significance/Contribution to the Field Evidence on interventions to reduce the risk of dog-related injury is limited and the application of many evidence-based interventions would be inappropriate, and unlikely to succeed in a rural community unless they are able to meet the identified barrier to intervention.