

## **'Treating cancer in non-metropolitan areas: exploring experiences and perceived needs for patient and practitioner support with Australian rural/regional health professionals.'**

Given the geographic disparities in health service availability, this study aimed to identify concerns about cancer care and outcomes from the point of view of health professionals working in regional, rural, and remote areas of Australia. The project explored the views of Australian health professionals regarding which factors they believe influence clinical care and outcomes for people with cancer, focusing on communication, barriers to accessing health services, and factors that may influence the provision of support. An understanding of the experiences of health professionals is a key step towards improving care, and providing recommendations to health services.

Eight health professionals were recruited through the COSA network, contributing to a total of eleven health professionals who participated in the semi-structured telephone interviews. COSA members from regional areas in WA, SA, NSW and VIC were recruited. The telephone interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis techniques. The themes which emerged from the interview data, and the overall conclusions, are currently being prepared for publication, and it is hoped that the findings will be publicly available later in 2017.

The findings of the study confirmed previous research indicating that there are many significant barriers to cancer care in regional areas predominantly associated with travel difficulties, poor communication, inadequate governance, and reduced accessibility of services. Additionally, treatment quality and support services were noted as inferior. Yet this study highlighted that cancer care in regional areas has many positive aspects. The community initiative, personalised care, and the protective strategies that health professionals had developed in order to overcome barriers, provide an original contribution to the literature in this field. These benefits could be utilised to encourage recruitment of health professionals to regional areas, and could be strengthened in order to enhance cancer care, making the experience for regional cancer patients equivalent or even better than that of metropolitan patients.