**CMHDARN RESEARCH SEEDING GRANTS 2017: TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL**

**WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?**
A research proposal is an outline of your proposed project. It is designed to:
- Define your research question/s and how you will address them.
- Demonstrate the originality and/or significance of the research.
- Highlight the contributions of the research to knowledge and/or practice.
- Persuade the reviewers of the importance of the research, its feasibility and that you have the necessary resources.

**WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL**
**Project Summary**
This section is an outline of your proposed research and should be intelligible and engaging to a person unfamiliar with the subject; summarise the purpose, relevance, aims and objectives, and the research methods and approach.

**Purpose**
This section outlines what you expect to achieve by doing the research or what problem gave rise to the research. When developing the purpose, ask yourself:
- What 'problem' will the proposed research address?
- Why does it matter that this problem is addressed?

**Relevance**
This section is to justify why you are doing the research in the first place; why it is important (significance) and what it will contribute (impact). For this, you will need to review the literature to gain an understanding of the key issues and what others have done in the area.

The purpose is to show that there are existing knowledge gaps and that your research will address them – that your research is important and worth doing!

Don't forget to show how the project links to existing practice and/or policy agendas – you want to give the reviewer a context of the project, show them how the project 'fits'.

**Aims and objectives**
Aims are broad statements about the overall goals, outcomes or intentions of the research (the *what*). Objectives are the actions you will take to achieve your research aims (the *how*).

**Research question/s**
This section identifies the question/s that your research will address. Here is an example using a PICOS framework: *How does CBT compare with DBT in improving quality of life outcomes for women in residential rehabilitation?*

| Item | What to think about | Example |
|---|---|---|
| P = Target population or problem | What are the defining characteristics of the target population? Or what is the problem type? | Women in residential rehabilitation |
| I = Intervention or indicator | What intervention or indicator is being considered? | Cognitive Behaviour Therapy program |
| C = Comparison or control | Is there an alternative intervention being considered? Or no intervention? | Dialectical Behaviour Therapy program |
| O = Outcome | What would be the desired effect you would like to see? What effects are not wanted? | Improved quality of life |
| S = Study design | What type/s of study design are you considering? | Randomised Controlled Trial |

**Methods and approach**
This section is to show that you have put some thought into how you will go about answering your research question/s. When choosing methods be realistic about the time/ resources/ access to data you have.

In this section describe the research methods and approach; include participants, data collection procedure and method of analysis.

**Outcomes and evaluation**
Outline how you will evaluate the project. Consider: What outcome measures will you use?

**Project risks and ethical considerations**
Identifying risks early on will help to keep the project on track. Some things to consider:
- Does the project need ethics approval?
- Is the sample size realistic given the timeframe?
- Do you have access to the data you need?
- How will you involve consumers? What other stakeholders do you need to engage with?
- What equipment/materials do you need?
- Will you/the participants need to travel? Have you included this in the budget?

**Timeframes and resources**
Outline the key project milestones and what resources are needed. Be realistic: What is your workload like? Have you allowed enough time to analyse your findings? What other reporting or QI timeframes do you need to consider?

**USEFUL TIPS**
- Ensure your research idea, question or problem is clearly stated, persuasive and addresses a demonstrable knowledge gap.
- The reviewers may not be experts in the subject area – ensure the content is intelligible and engaging to a general audience.
- Do some reading. You need to demonstrate that you understand how the project fits with existing research, practice and/or policy agendas.
- When reviewing the literature, don't just look at what the authors have found, look at their research methods and approach – this will help with your project design.
- Is your project realistic and achievable? While it is important to persuade the reviewer of the project's originality or importance, you must first and foremost demonstrate that the project can actually be completed.
- The word limits are there for a reason – describe what you are wanting to do and why, in a clear and concise way.

- Don't leave your proposal to the last minute – writing a proposal takes time, particularly if you are developing one for the first time.
- Identify early on who you need to engage with and talk to them before submitting the proposal. Give yourself time to garner the appropriate supports and approvals.
- Think seriously about whether you have the capacity to do the project. Think about your workload and talk to the organisation about what resources you need (and can have).
- Don't forget to look after yourself and don't go it alone! Support and mentoring is available.

**RECOMMENDED READING**
CMHDARN, *Ask the experts: A CMHDARN best practice guide to enabling consumer and carer leadership in research and evaluation*. Sydney, 2015. Available:
http://cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/BPG-CCPIR-FINAL-201512011.pdf

CMHDARN, *Research Ethics: A CMHDARN Best Practice Guide*. Sydney, 2016. Available:
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Flinders University Archaeology Department, *Thesis Proposal Guidelines*. Adelaide, 2015.

Sue Goodwin, Social Policy Research Network, University of Sydney, *From ideas to action: Developing a research proposal*. Sydney, 2012. [Presentation slides]

The University of Melbourne, *Writing a research proposal: A guide for science and engineering students*. Melbourne, n.d.

The University of Adelaide, *Guide to writing your research proposal for higher degree by research applicants*. Adelaide, 2013.

University of Canberra, Evidence-based practice in health: Using the PICO framework. Canberra, 2017.

University of Wollongong Learning Resource Centre, *Research and Thesis Writing*. Wollongong, 2001.