

## **MINUTES: Hazelwood Study Contract Steering Committee**

**Wednesday 24 June 2015, 11.30am**

**Room 15.01, Department of Health & Human Services**

### **Attendees from Monash:**

- Prof Judi Walker
- Prof Michael Abramson
- Ms Gillian Ormond

### **Attendees from DHHS:**

- Ms Carmel Flynn (Director, Health Protection)
- Ms Sandra Falconer (Manager, Environmental Health and **meeting Chair**)
- Ms Liz Hughes (Inquiry Response team)
- Dr Andrew Neil (Health Protection Strategic Projects & Regulatory Policy).

### **Apologies:**

- Prof Michael Ackland (Acting Chief Health Officer)
- Mr Alexander McLeod (Acting project manager DHHS)
- Dr Danny Csutoros (Environmental Health DHHS)
- Prof Zahid Ansari (Health Intelligence Unit DHHS).

### **1. Welcome**

- The Chair, Sandra, welcomed all attendees and noted apologies. She also introduced the new Director, Health Protection, Carmel Flynn, who has replaced Graeme Gillespie.
- Michael noted that DHHS security were unaware of Monash staff attendance at today's meeting.

**ACTION:** Andrew to follow up with Alex re need for visitor bookings for Monash staff.

**OUTCOME:** Apologies from Alex and this oversight will not happen again!

- Sandra also asked that acronyms not be used in the project monthly status reports.

**ACTION:** Gillian to follow up on this recommendation for future reports.

### **2. Update from Monash**

- See also project monthly status report.
- The official website went live on 1 June ([www.hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au](http://www.hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au)) and generated a lot of media interest, with Judi giving a number of interviews; four team members have had training on how to manage website content.

- Note that four of the studies have had name changes, some based on community feedback:
  - Baseline survey is now **Adult survey**
  - Child psychology is now **Schools' study**
  - Child health and development is now **Early Life Follow-up study**
  - The Cardiovascular & respiratory linkage studies is now **Hazelinks**.
- Monash are currently working to harmonise all survey tools to ensure consistency.
- Monash submitted an interim report on 15 June to DHHS and are waiting on formal DHHS review of this report. The successful submission of the interim report triggers a milestone payment. Judi noted that Monash acknowledged that Prof Ackland was currently on leave – Judi suggested de-coupling DHHS review of report from payment process, if review likely to take an extended period of time.

**ACTION:** Andrew to follow up with Prof Ackland on his return to determine his timelines to provide formal review.

**OUTCOME:** Prof Ackland has reviewed the interim report and has given approval for the milestone payment to be paid.

- Community Advisory Committee (CAC) has also met again and was presented with information regarding the Community Wellbeing stream. Also discussed the utilisation of Sale community as the comparison community: there is evidence of smoke in other parts of the Latrobe Valley from the mine fire, however, modelling indicated that Sale did not have mine fire smoke. CAC was happy for Sale to be used for this purpose. Planning underway for announcement of Sale as comparison community - community engagement and briefing to be done.
- Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Oceans & Atmosphere Flagship has undertaken to calibrate their smoke model on actual data. They may have overestimated the exposures in Morwell - and they will revise this based on available measurements. Sandra noted that the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) are about to publish indicative data of their estimates of smoke in early days of event. Michael noted that EPA have been very helpful in supplying available data. A lay summary of CSIRO report will also be prepared and published by Monash.
- Monash are about to put out a tender for Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) for adult and Latrobe Early Life Follow-up studies. This is an extensive process. Have had input from an advisory panel, with draft questions in the interim report.
- Monash are also having ongoing engagement with the Morwell community, to keep people aware of study and increase interest in participation. The length of time required to undertake this study requires constant community reinforcement to maintain interest. Judi also noted that there has been engagement with Indigenous groups to encourage participation from the Aboriginal community.
- Monash has had ethics and recruitment protocol approval for the Adult survey. Monash wants to send a letter, explanatory statement and consent form to potential Adult study participants. Monash are also considering using the Victorian Electoral roll as an aid to recruitment for the Adult survey, with an understanding that this may require work with the Privacy Commissioner.

**ACTION:** Andrew to investigate which Minister oversees the Victorian Electoral Commission and email Gillian – may be necessary for DHHS to write to relevant Minister seeking support for use of Victorian Electoral roll for study recruitment.

**OUTCOME:** Relevant Minister is Special Minister for State, Hon Gavin Jennings MP. Andrew emailed Gillian with this information.

- Psychological impact stream - part of Adult study: a traumatic exposure scale has been piloted online with CAC, but not Morwell people directly.
- Schools' study: Monash have met with schools. Will pilot survey at beginning of Term 3 and then to start data collection after that.
- The Latrobe Early Life Follow-up (ELF) study: ethics approval given. Protocols circulated and discussed. Have established another 1800 number and website - as many of the researchers are from University of Tasmania.
- Monash have met with Ms Ying Chen, Manager Data Linkage Unit (DLU) in DHHS - and have a good understanding of work they do and what that Unit can provide.

Researchers from the University of Tasmania will have a meeting with DLU in late August as they will want anonymous perinatal data to determine if the mine fire resulted in differences in birth-weight. DLU needs to know that this request from Tasmania is associated with the overall study. Michael to send through data request regarding perinatal data.

**ACTION:** Andrew to raise this with DLU staff.

**OUTCOME:** Andrew discussed this with Ms Chen, Manager DLU. Andrew stressed the need for as much support as possible for the study team, given the significance of the long-term health study. Ms Chen indicated that DLU were aware that the University of Tasmania researchers were associated with the study team. She will also investigate the possibility of bringing forward the August meeting with the Tasmanian team.

If Monash requires further support in its dealings with DLU, please contact Andrew Neil.

- The Community Wellbeing stream has obtained ethics approval. This component of the study is being conducted by Federation University Australia. They have started the interviews for part of their study and have commenced recruitment for the focus groups.
- Older persons study is about to commence.
- Hazelinks (the cardiovascular & respiratory linkage studies) has submitted an application to Ambulance Victoria regarding cardiac arrest callouts between those exposed and those not exposed. This project report may be one of the first deliverables.
- Plans for next reporting period: see summary on page 4 of report.

### 3. Previous actions / outstanding issues

- Sandra noted that the media protocol has been finalised and has been tabled in the interim report. Bram Alexander (Media Unit, DHHS) has been involved in the development of this protocol. It has been used already as part of website.

- Sandra also raised questions from interim report:

Is the Community Wellbeing stream pilot study conducted by Federation University available? Judi noted that the report had been presented to CAC and that Tim Owen (DHHS, Gippland Region) has a copy. This study will also be uploaded to study website in the near future and Judi indicated that a copy can be sent to DHHS.

**ACTION:** Gillian to send a copy of the Community Wellbeing stream pilot study report to Alexander McLeod.

- Sandra also noted the interim report indicates that a very large 7500 sample size is required from the Morwell community. This is half the town's population. Michael noted that this relates to the adult CATI survey, with an additional 4000 adults in Sale. If the study team cannot obtain telephone numbers for these populations, they will have to rely upon mail addresses to try and recruit participants - another reason for getting addresses from VEC. Michael also noted that if needed, the study team will employ door-knockers to chase up participants. 70 per cent follow-up will provide enough power to detect a possible effect on mortality. There is a graph in the interim report which addresses this issue.
- Sandra also highlighted Faye Johnson's presentation to GPs at Medicare Local (page 25 interim report). Sandra noted that it would be useful for DHHS to see these presentations - maybe a drop box could be set up. Michael noted that currently, files are being archived on a secure database at Monash. Judi noted that the study team could also provide presentations to DHHS staff to keep them updated on developments. Sandra thanked Monash for this offer and suggested that one of the monthly Friday morning Health Protection Branch master-classes could be a good forum for these presentations.

**ACTION:** Andrew to follow up re master-class schedule.

**OUTCOME:** The next available master-class is Friday 11 September 2015, 10.00-11.00am - would this be acceptable for Monash? Please advise Andrew Neil.

- Sandra also noted page 29 of the interim report addressed effective communications. Sandra noted that both Monash and DHHS have significant communications' activities. Having representation of both Monash and DHHS Inquiry Response Team at these Steering Committee meetings is important from a communications' perspective. Judi agreed that it was important for DHHS and Monash to ensure key communication activities were consistent and coordinated. She also suggested requesting Pamela Wood (leader of the Community wellbeing stream) to provide DHHS with a presentation - as she has conducted many of the initial communications' activities and this could inform DHHS's communications.

**ACTION:** Gillian to follow up with Pamela Wood re provision of a presentation to DHHS. This could potentially coincide with the master-class discussed in the previous dot point.

#### 4. Other business

- Michael raised the issue of involvement of emergency services' staff in the study. Monash have received requests from emergency responders (Victoria Police and EPA staff) who wish to participate in the study. Michael also indicated that fire officers may be about to request participation. Michael clarified that the study would already be covering emergency responders if they lived in Morwell at

the time of the fire, but not if they only worked in Morwell at that time. To do so would involve mission creep – extending beyond the original scope of the study.

Sandra reiterated the need to exclude occupational health and safety (OHS) issues from this study; Morwell residents are in study scope.

**ACTION:** Sandra indicated that she would discuss this with Tony Murphy from Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to see if that organisation was proposing to conduct a health study on emergency responders.

**OUTCOME:** EMV has advised that Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country Fire Authority (CFA) employees are already in a voluntary monitoring program (not just for Hazelwood). EPA and Victoria Police should be referred to their own OHS areas as the Monash study does not include (nor is it funded) for this. Responders, however, who live in Morwell are also community members and may be included.

Michael noted that if such a study was proposed, Malcolm Sim from Monash has extensive experience in research of OHS issues.

- Judi noted that Monash have had enquiries from Department of Premier & Cabinet regarding information on the study. Responses have been drafted by study team, but it can be difficult to know how to frame responses when the context behind the questions is unknown.

**ACTION:** Liz to follow up with Lily Wong (Inquiry Response Team). It would be appropriate for Monash to forward requests for information from other Departments to Alex McLeod; Carmel also indicated that she would be happy to follow up these issues if required.

- Liz noted that DHHS and Monash need to coordinate engagement and consultation activities to prevent the risk of community double bookings.

**ACTION:** DHHS staff to coordinate engagement and consultation activities through Gillian.

5. **Next meeting:** Tuesday 28 July, 10.00am-11.00am, room 15.01, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

**Meeting closed at 12.10pm.**