What Influences Aeromedical Retrieval Performance in Remote Australia? Stakeholder Perspectives

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Larrakia people, the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which the meeting is held. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present and on all the lands where we work.

Introduction

Background

- A National Project funded by MRFF RART3 through CAAHSN
- Aeromedical retrieval services are essential to healthcare in remote communities
- Variation in retrieval service models
- Little is known about impacts of models on performance

Project Aims

- Identify indicators for monitoring remote Australian retrieval systems;
- Explore retrieval model characteristics contributing to performance



Research Methodology

Mixed data collection methods

- Literature/Document review
- Administrative data collection from retrieval organisations
- **Semi-structured interviews**
- Workshop

Qualitative data analysis

- Transcribing and coding data *(using Nvivo)*
- Thematic analysis (*Clarke and Braun, 2006, 2022*)

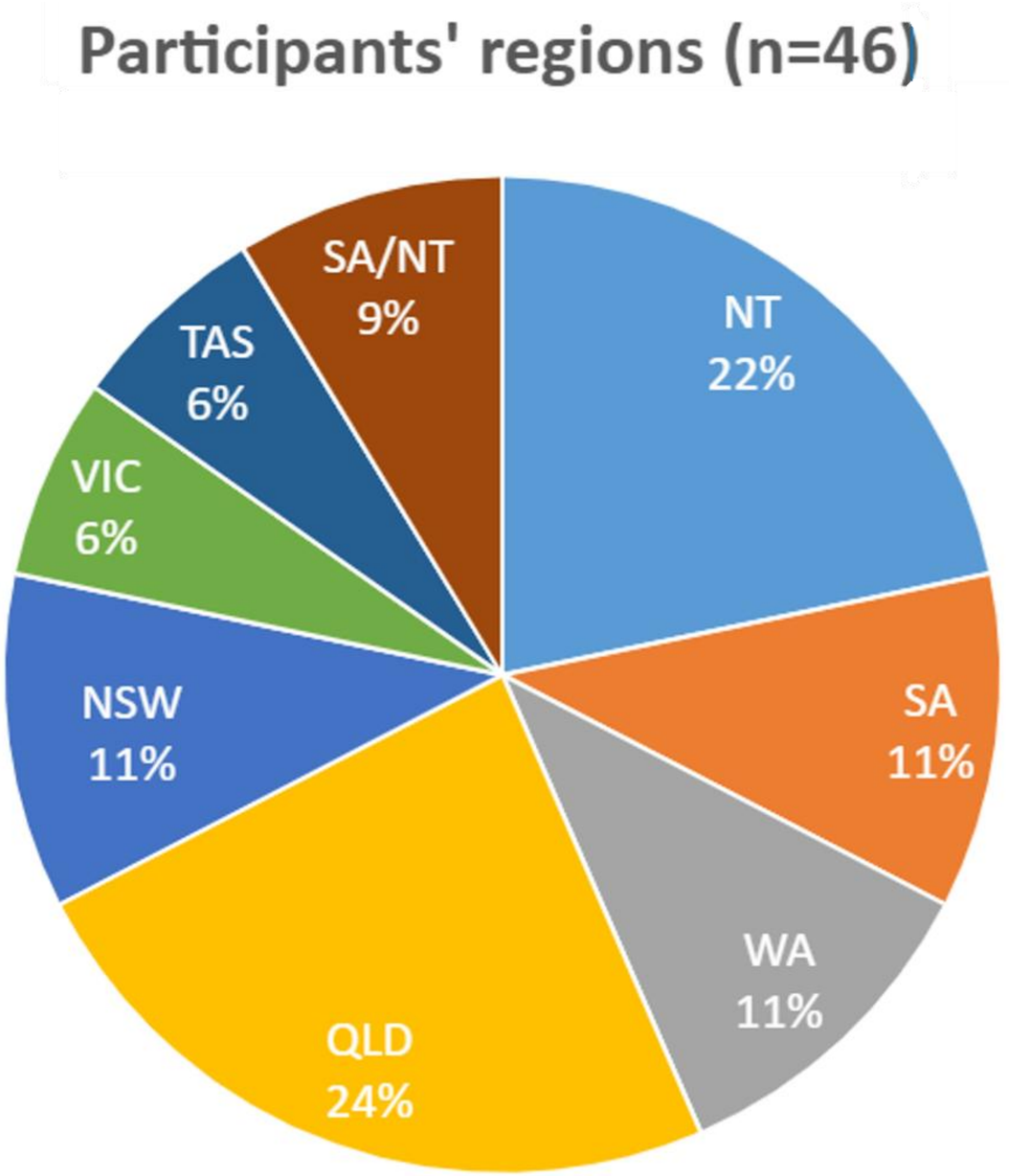
Results

Participants

- 46 participants
- 17 services/organisations
- Various roles

Themes

1. Service models
2. Workforce capacity
3. Funding sustainability
4. Governance
5. Partnerships
6. Cultural safety
7. Information management



Theme 1: Service models

- From centralised to decentralised models.
- Multiple providers
- Centralised models promote collaboration and coordinated care.
- High-performing systems feature centralised coordination, integrated teams, strong governance, workforce capability, and standardised processes.



[in a centralised model], "One point of call… the doctor on the ground makes one phone call and then deals with the patient." (P1)

…So having a dedicated coordination…, So someone is doing all the things regarding…how to get a team to the patient and the actual team itself is just focusing on looking after the patient… (P3)

Theme 2: Workforce capacity



- Highly committed and skilled multidisciplinary workforce
- Training, teamwork, and integration
- Shortages and retention challenges in some regions
- Sustainable staffing: flexible models and staff wellbeing support

Workforce is the foundation on which safe, effective, and resilient retrieval services are built.

"I think the staff do it because they love it." (P1)

"They give you all of the tools you need to succeed in the retrieval space." (P3)

"…continued challenge of keeping up the staffing in a remote area with a high staffing turnover" (P25).

Theme 3: Funding sustainability

- Highlighted government investment, innovative funding mechanisms, and ongoing commitment.
- Fragmented and inequitable funding reduces system efficiency.
- Remote services are often underfunded.
- Growing demand continues to outpace resources.
- Sustainable investment and funding innovation are needed.



"….And then you come to [remote service], who are doing such a huge scope, and um and you know, it, it was just so obvious how much less funds there were available but the passion and the commitment and the enormous skills that all my colleagues have in [service location] just blew me away (P28)"

"It's woefully underfunded and yet it's covering a vast area with very limited resources." (P4)

Theme 4: Governance



- Robust clinical governance underpin high-quality retrieval care
- Centralised coordination strengthens governance
- Data governance and national consistency remain key challenges
- Rural and remote voices need stronger representation

"Our ability to centrally clinically coordinate... is probably the most valuable part of the service. ……Everyone is brought into the governance process." (P2)

"It would be super beneficial so that all retrieval services can benchmark themselves against each other from a national [perspective], and we all feed into a national database." (P2)

Theme 5: Partnerships



- Partnerships are fundamental
- Coordination, co-location, and trusted relationships
- Aboriginal health service partnerships are essential
- Organisational silos hinder integration
- Shared governance and integrated care networks are key future priorities

“We have very close relationship with ACCHOs and Aboriginal Corporations... we understand their challenges.” (P10)

"There's a lot of camaraderie... between all the different organisations to make sure remote Australia is covered." (P23)

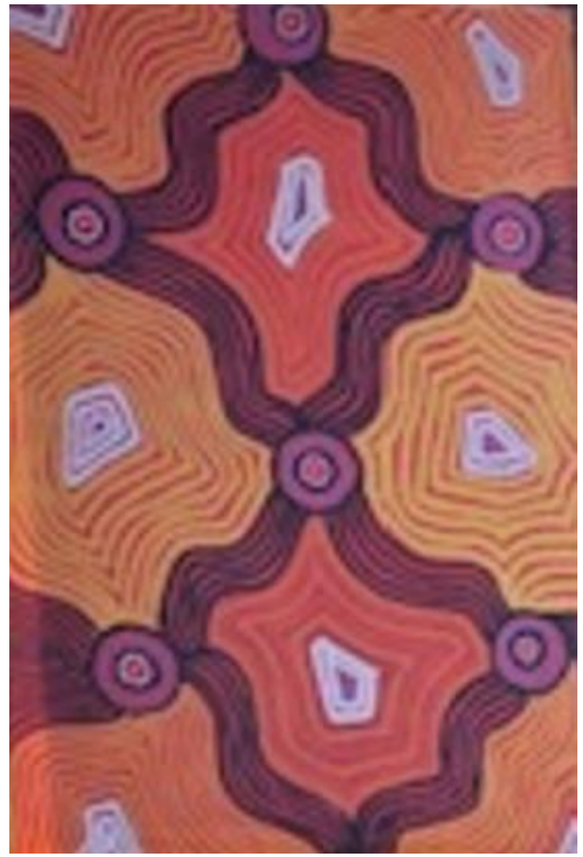
“We have barriers between aero-medical providers, and ambulance, and health.” (P31)

Theme 6: Cultural safety

- Cultural safety as key for Aboriginal people
- A big role in every stages of aero-med retrieval services
- Organisational culture
- Aboriginal culture and patient needs

'I think there's a really humble reflective and inclusive culture and I think, I think I'd like to say respectful as well.' (P25)

"We at least try and provide healthcare on Country and, only transfer when it's unavoidable….. And so you know, you've probably heard, we also repatriate patients to Country, so they can die on Country" (P28).



Theme 7: Information management



- Information systems play a key role
- Telehealth is essential
- Fragmented information systems & poor interoperability
- Underdeveloped national data standards, benchmarking, and a retrieval registry

”in <organisation name>, everyone’s on the same electronic medical record, but yeah, there’s still some hospitals that don't have the same system. Everything gets printed out.” (P3)

“There’s too many pieces of software for clinicians... and none of them talk to each other.” (P15)

“Telehealth is absolutely integral to a safe retrieval service, and to a safe remote care service.” (P13)

Discussion & Conclusion

- **System integration**: Strong governance, coordinated services, and multidisciplinary teams **improve performance and safety**.
- **Sustainable resources**: Equitable funding, skilled workforces, and staff wellbeing **ensure long-term service sustainability**.
- **Culturally safe care**: Aboriginal partnerships, telehealth, and interoperable data systems **improve access and equity**.
- **Future priorities**: National performance standards, benchmarking, and integrated networks **strengthen system-wide coordination**.



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New South Wales Ambulance	Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS), WA
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Thank you!

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