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MEDIA RELEASE

Social enterprises improve health and wellbeing in regional cities

A new study of four social enterprise ventures in regional cities around Australia found considerable benefits to participants health and wellbeing by increasing economic participation and social engagement. The findings will be presented at the 15th National Rural Health Conference in Hobart from 24-27 March.

Researchers from the University of Tasmania, Swinburne University and Wollongong University, examined the impact of social enterprises on people experiencing disadvantage in regional cities in Tasmania and Victoria.

Professor Sue Kilpatrick, from the University of Tasmania, said the study focussed on social enterprises in regional cities which have populations which face inequalities related to health and wellbeing including educational and employment opportunities and social networks.

“We found that people who were socially and economically disadvantaged had improved quality of life as a result of their participation in the social enterprises we examined in the research. The improvements were directly related to the person’s ability to participate and contribute in their local communities,” Professor Kilpatrick said.

The social enterprises involved in the study developed strong connections and links with local business and local government agencies that helped build social capital in the regional cities. “Participants benefited from opportunities generated through these connections,” she said. “Our study found that consumers are attracted to social enterprises not simply for altruistic reasons but because the products and services better meet the needs of consumers in regional cities. The social enterprises were really filling a niche market in these communities.

“We had one example of a social enterprise that provided services for a state government department and this resulted in employees being invited to activities like the department Christmas party. Examples such as this led to increased self esteem and social networking opportunities for the participants,” Professor Kilpatrick said.

“Social enterprises are providing great opportunities for disadvantaged people to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, participate in the social and economic life of communities and develop practical skills. This all leads to improved health and well-being and benefits for the whole community.”

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