

Centre for Research Excellence  
in Medical Workforce Dynamics

Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL)

# Integrating research and evaluation into health workforce policy – How has MABEL helped?

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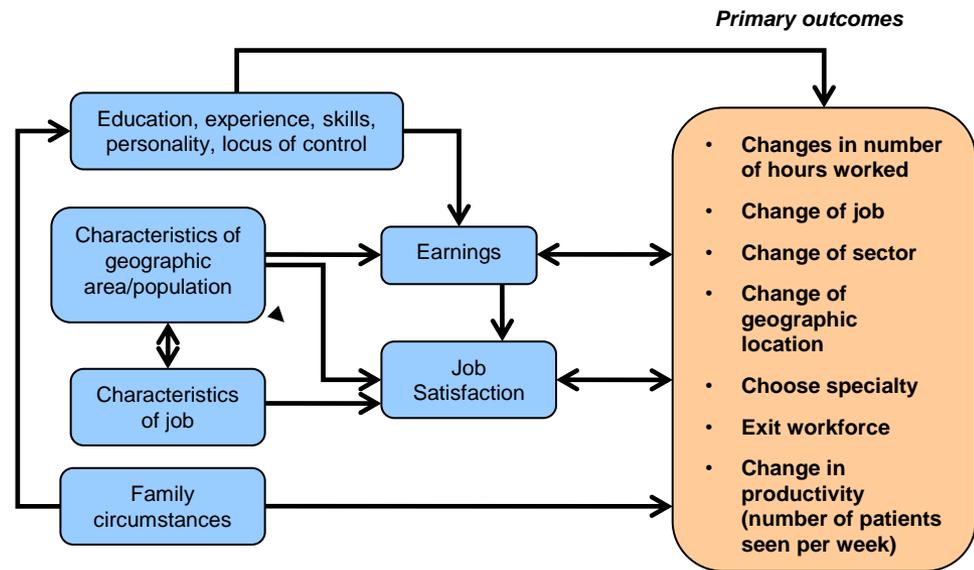


**MONASH University**  
Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

# MABEL – The AIM

## Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life

“to examine how the determinants of medical workforce decisions impact on workforce distribution and the working patterns of doctors”



# MABEL – The evidence

**MABEL data:** provided the basis for improved understanding of:

- what doctors do
- levels of satisfaction
- factors associated with recruitment and retention
- nature and effect of incentives to stay or move



# Integrating research with policy

## Three sentinel pillars:

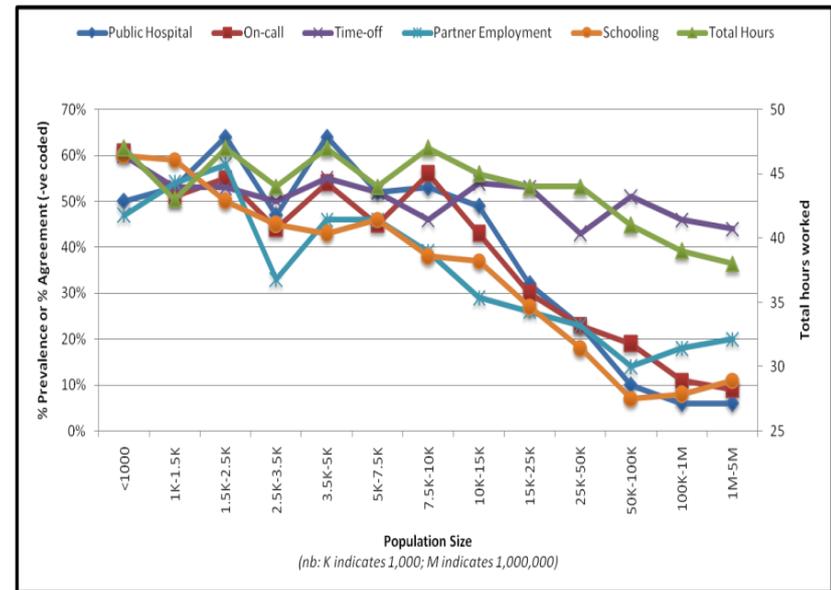
*When a recognized **problem** marries an effective **policy solution** and the **politics** are right, this alignment of the three streams opens the ‘policy window’*

(Kingdon JW, 2011: *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Longman, Boston)

# The problem

## Rural medical workforce retention - Who should get what incentives?

- **Policy intervention:**
  - Pay GPs to stay longer
- **Stakeholder concerns:**
  - Expensive program
  - Controversy over who should get what
  - Lack of evidence that retention grants work
- **Research focus:**
  - How does rural practice differ and why does knowing this assist workforce policies?
- **Policy recommendation:**
  - Community size combined with remoteness is a fairer basis for allocation than existing ASGC scheme



**Reference:** Humphreys JS, McGrail M, Joyce C, Scott A & Kalb G, 2012: Who should receive recruitment and retention incentives? Improved targeting of rural doctors using medical workforce data, *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 20, 3-10.

# Impact of research on policy

- “The committee was impressed with the comprehensive nature of the model ... and ... is supportive of the methodology and data utilised.” ([Australian Government Senate Enquiry, 2012](#))
- “The model provides a sound and practical basis on which to move forward ...” ([RDAA, 2013](#))
- The new classification “will allow support and resources to be focused on areas where there is the most need” ([Assistant Minister for Health, Fiona Nash, 2014](#))

# The importance of knowledge translation

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- How can we maximise take-up of our evidence into policies?
- Without implementation into policies, programs, and practice interventions, the evidence produced by rural health research is wasted!

# Lessons learned

## Facilitators of knowledge exchange

- Ensure **rigorous** evidence
- Trust and **credibility** of the researchers and relationship with end-user
- **Message customised** to the key audiences
- **Validation & risk analyses**
- **Serendipity** – when the problem, policy and politics came together
- **Persistence** and commitment of researchers
- Government **culture** - the use of research in policy enhanced when government values research.

# Lessons learned

Barriers to implementation - Endogenous factors

## Issues relating to researching the problem

- **The nature of the problem** – difficult normative issues eg: how to change human behaviour or how much to spend on the problem
- **Policy design failure** – inappropriate relationship between outcome sought and intervention strategy. Partial solution because problems poorly understood or blinkered by ideological approach
- **Implementation requirements not defined** eg timeframe, costs, organisational structure and who has responsibility for carriage are not specified

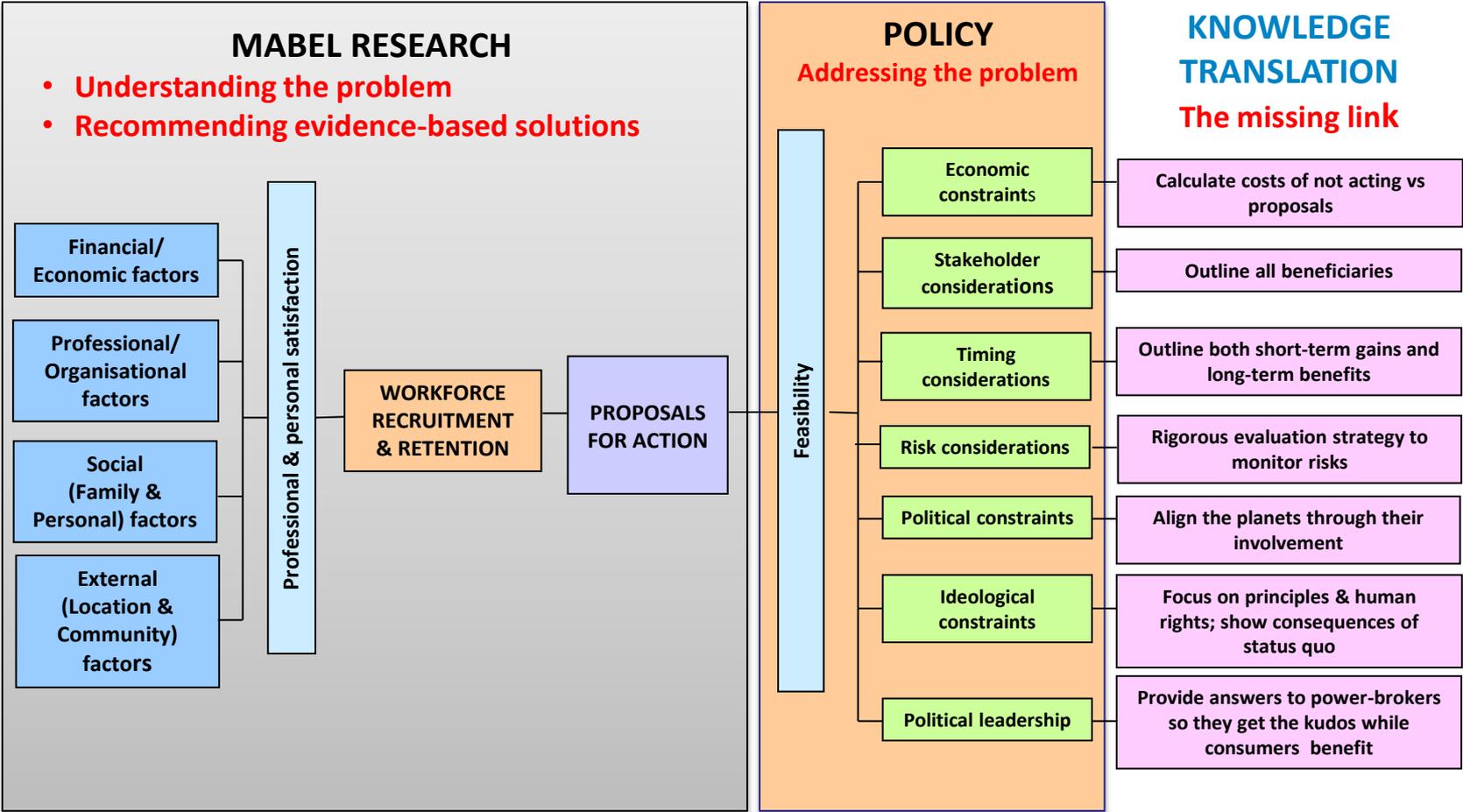
# Lessons learned

Barriers to implementation – Exogenous factors

## Politics & Policy environment

- **Resistance to change** – eg: due to a plurality of interests
- **Political structural relationships** - eg: legislative difficulties, divisions of responsibilities between levels of government, program boundaries too rigid
- **Economic factors** – eg: lack of resources
- **Lack of community involvement and support**
- Political events, particularly at budget and election times, can **change priorities**
- **Lack of commitment** - Was any action ever intended?

# Impact of MABEL research on policy



# MABEL

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**An indispensable resource for rural  
workforce planning**

**THANK YOU**