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Research infrastructure for problem-based research: aligning research, policy and practice

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Background

The internationally recognised success of the Australian response to the HIV epidemic has been largely attributed to the collaborative partnerships forged between researchers, health professionals, and policy makers over the last twenty five years. Partner participation has been at all stages of the research process including development and revision of research instruments, collection and analysis of data, and dissemination of findings. The infrastructure project, building on an online database developed at the National Centre in HIV Social Research at UNSW between 2004 and 2008, delivers a system that meets the diverse requirements of all stakeholders, while benefiting the research program as a whole. It provides web-based access, free of charge, to academic and non-academic research partners in Australia and internationally.

Infrastructure for partnerships

The system provides a facility for the curation, sharing and exchange of resources required by academic, government and community-based partners throughout the research process. Underpinning the design is the proposition that alignment of research with policy and practice will be facilitated if collaborators are able to access and share resources in a timely and efficient manner. In addition to dissemination of research findings and research translation, functionality supports multi-way exchange of resources between researchers, policy developers, practitioners and affected communities.

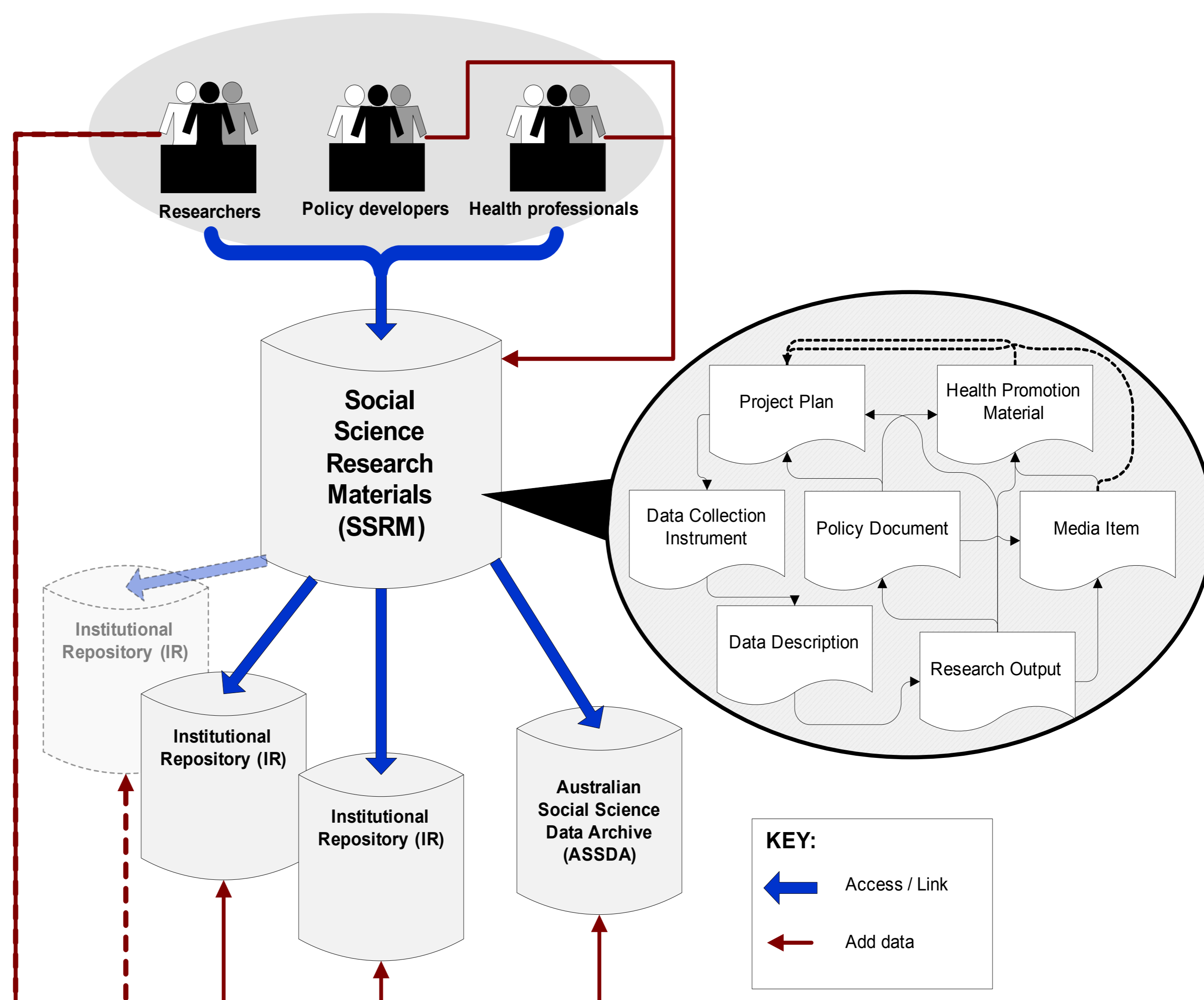
By providing a platform for collaboration and information exchange, the project strengthens existing partnerships and facilitates new ones, leading to more robust research and increased research impact. Easy access to resources from across the sector promotes dialogue and discussion that enables policy and resource developers to draw on the strengths of existing resources in the development of new initiatives. Access to research materials from previous projects, including those conducted at other institutions, equips researchers to develop more cohesive programs of research.

Infrastructure for problem-based research

The project is designed to integrate meaningfully with work practices of problem-based research in which research partners and stakeholders from academic, government, community-based and industry groups collaborate to find innovative solutions to social and public health problems. It provides a model for infrastructure that is responsive to the broad context of a particular research area, and is positioned as an integrated and generative component of the research process.

Content and relationships

A Fedora-based repository system stores, preserves, and articulates relationships between resources. The repository adopts a lifecycle approach to the management of research materials. Documents derived from various phases of the research process, including project plans and data collection instruments, are stored alongside and linked to



publications and other research output. Extending the research lifecycle model, repository content incorporates associated policy, cultural and media material, from government and community-based organisations, and mainstream and community media sources.

The system interoperates with existing infrastructure, including national data archives and repositories of research output. Metadata records of research data are linked to datasets held in the Australian Social Science Data Archives and records of publication material are linked to existing content in institutional repositories of Australian universities.


Future developments

Proposed developments (2010 -) will further bridge the gap between eResearch infrastructure capabilities and social science research practice.

- Construction of a tool to enable system users to select specified resources from the repository and external websites for aggregation in web-based resource maps, for re-use and exchange between stakeholders.
- Implementation of an existing dissemination tool, *Citation Builder*¹ to enable research partners to manage delivery of content directly to research and project websites.

¹ *Citation Builder*, developed at UNSW under the ARROW project, delivers formatted citations from repository content to websites. See <http://handle.unsw.edu.au/1959.4/40106>

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