

POPULATION HEALTH IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT ANNUAL SAPRIN CONFERENCE

27 JUNE 2024



The Annual SAPRIN Conference took place from 24 – 26 June at the Wits RHI in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. The conference was convened under the apt theme, “**Societies in Motion: Understanding Population Health.**”

The Best Practice workshop occurred annually for 5 years and has now evolved into a fully-fledged conference. The move to a conference marks the progression of the annual workshop from an operationally focused gathering to a more holistic and science-focused event.

The [South African Population Research Infrastructure Network](#) (SAPRIN) is a network of public, and academic institutions, and stakeholders in a long-term partnership to produce high quality research. SAPRIN is hosted at the South African Medical Research Council and funded by the Department of Science and Innovation.

Approximately 90 delegates attended the conference from the 6 HDSS nodes and other key stakeholder organisations. GRT-INSPIRED was the host node.

SAPRIN has three rural Health and Demographic Surveillance Sites (HDSS); Aginccourt in Mpumalanga, DIMAMO in Polokwane and Africa Health Research Institute in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The 3 recently established urban nodes are GRT-INSPIRED in Gauteng (Hillbrow, Atteridgeville and Melusi); Cape Town (Bishop Lavis and Nomzamo) and USINGA (Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal).

Professor Helen Rees, Executive Director of the Wits RHI opened the scientific plenary session with a presentation titled, “Urbanisation: The Role of Health and Socio-Demographic Surveillance Systems.” Her comprehensive presentation spoke about the national context and delved into the specifics of the GRT-INSPIRED node while touching on its history. Emerging health challenges in the urban context of urbanisation were unpacked. She spoke about the need to increase funding of SAPRIN scientists and fieldworkers, the power to do more by working together and enhancing the promotion of SAPRIN results.

The first day of the conference was dedicated to the newly added scientific track. A total of 27 abstracts were received during the call for submissions and 8 abstracts were selected for presentation. The topics were diverse and pertinent ranging from mental health within low income settings during COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of frailty in elderly participants in DIMAMO and exploring age and sex as determinants of internal migration in South Africa.

The 8 successful abstracts and 11 abstracts that were not chosen for presentation can be viewed here [SAPRINConferenceAR.pdf \(mrc.ac.za\)](#). Proceedings for the scientific track also included 3 breakaway sessions headed by SAPRIN and the various nodes. This was followed by a panel discussion headed by the various nodal directors.

Dr Kobus Herbst, Director of SAPRIN presented an overview on the status, achievements and future plans of SAPRIN. He said that the appointment of a seventh node was on the cards for 2024. The SAPRIN strategic planning for the 5 year period from 2025 to 2030 would commence during the conference. The session discussed the mission of SAPRIN in terms of the science on research infrastructure.

Host node Director, Professor Everatt of GRT-INSPIRED delivered a detailed presentation on the node detailing the geographic location, challenging conditions that exist, outreach initiatives and progress being made.

The rest of day 2 focused on plenary sessions on stakeholder engagement, data management, SAPRIN Questionnaire changes and communication. Day 3 kicked off with a site visit of Hillbrow by GRT-INSPIRED. Fieldworkers and trackers showed delegates the areas that research takes place in, explained the working conditions, the challenges they encounter and the progress they have made.

The rest of the day focused on parallel sessions in strategic planning, community engagement, Questionnaire changes and code book and communication. The Questionnaire change session saw robust engagement on areas of suggested change. Community engagement highlighted the various initiatives of outreach. The communication workstream looked at the coordination and alignment of communication efforts across the network.

Dr Kobus Herbst announced the creation of the SAPRIN Population Science Seminar Series. This virtual series of meetings is in response to requests from delegates at the conference for a space to facilitate discourse regularly between SAPRIN and the various nodes.

The conference, the first in this format saw robust discussion, informative content, engaging interaction and was well received by delegates.