



Charles Sturt
University

Three Rivers
Department of
Rural Health



2023 Year in Review

Supporting the growth and development
of the rural health workforce



Director's message

The recent completion of our activity and financial reporting brings the 2023 work program to a close. This has allowed us to look into the rear-view mirror to celebrate some of the successes we have achieved.

It is impossible to capture everything in one publication; however, I congratulate the team on another stellar year, and I want to highlight just a few of their accomplishments.

Partnerships and collaborations were key features of 2023, and there is no doubt that we could not achieve as much as we do without the support from an extensive range of stakeholders both within the university and externally. I want to make particular mention of the range of host employers and clinicians who are our rural health partners in education, as well as valued research partners engaged with our team to conduct high quality and relevant research outputs.

This past year saw the growth of our allied health expansion program in the Lachlan region and the commencement of the aged care expansion program in Deniliquin. Both programs have provided a welcome boost in funding and focus on key areas of rural health inequity.

Additionally, the growing body of work in mental health has seen significant expansion in rural mental health placements, with student reflections demonstrating the value of these experiences.

We delivered many professional development sessions in rural communities in 2023. These were very well attended, and clinicians appreciated the opportunity for face-to-face training.

I want to thank our Advisory Board members and the members of our Allied Health and Aged Care Expansion Advisory Committees. Your time and contributions are highly valued.

I also want to acknowledge the continued funding support of the Department of Health and Aged Care. The Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program provides the opportunity for locally relevant and tailored activities to address rural workforce challenges through University Departments of Rural Health, and we look forward to continued funding with a new contract expected to be received later this year for work in 2025 and beyond.

As always, our people at Three Rivers Department of Rural Health are the key to our success. The team constantly inspires me with their drive and enthusiasm to go the extra mile, find solutions to problems, and develop creative ideas towards achieving our objectives. It is a privilege to lead this group, and I look forward to working with our stakeholders as we roll out our 2024 activity work plans.

Christine Howard
 Director
 Three Rivers Department of Rural Health

Charles Sturt University Three Rivers Department of Rural Health is funded under the Australian Government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program. In consortium partnership with the University of New South Wales, The University of Notre Dame Australia, and Western Sydney University, Three Rivers DRH aims to improve the recruitment and retention of nursing, midwifery, allied health and dentistry professionals in rural and remote Australia.

We pay our respects to all First Nations Elders past, present and emerging. In particular, we acknowledge the Wiradjuri, Ngunawal, Gundungurra, Birpai, Wamba Wamba Perrepa Perrepa, Wailwan, Wadi Wadi and Nari Nari peoples of Australia, who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live, work and learn together.

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Live. Study. Work. Rural.

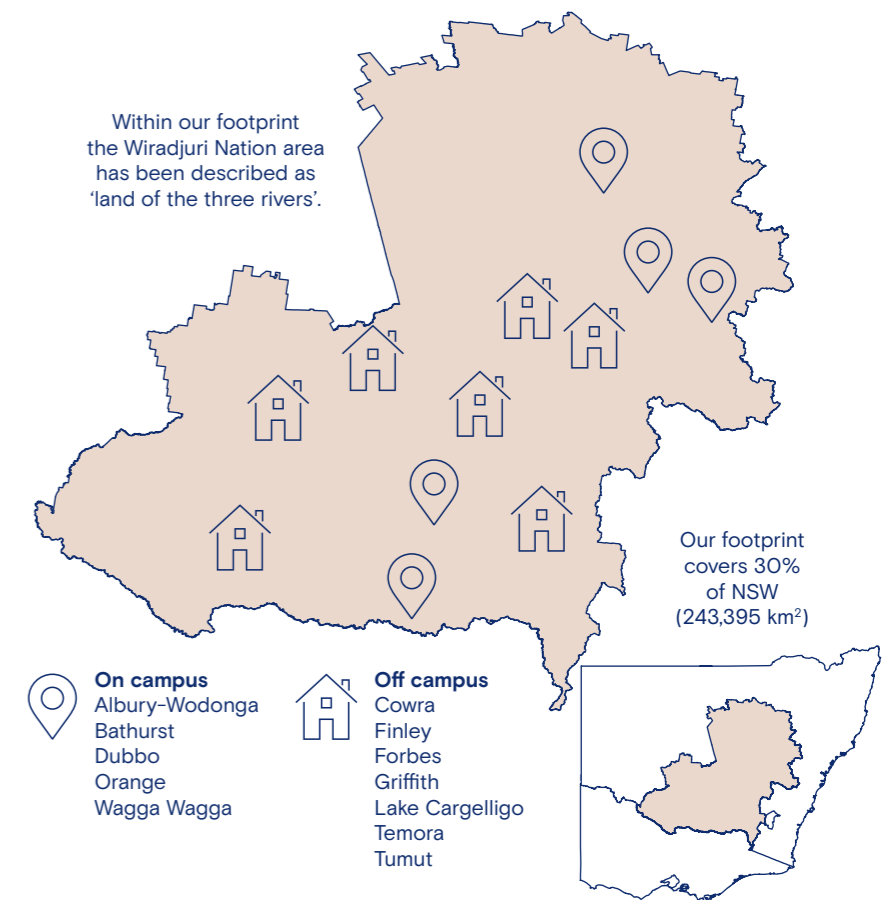
Charles Sturt University Three Rivers Department of Rural Health (DRH) is based in the Riverina and Central West region of New South Wales.

Our goal is to improve the recruitment and retention of nursing, midwifery, allied health and dentistry professionals in rural and remote Australia.

We work with educators, healthcare providers and local communities across our footprint to support health students and rural health professionals.

We support research into rural health training and workforce development, and rural health service delivery models that support the health and wellbeing of First Nations peoples and rural communities.

We are one of 19 University Departments of Rural Health operating across Australia funded under the Australian Government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program.





We have seven off-campus properties

During 2023, we strengthened our partnerships with Residence Life and St Martins to support more students in subsidised on-campus accommodation.

We now manage our Placement Grant applications internally and have streamlined the Outreach Visit Support Scheme processes for a faster turnaround for students.

The amount of funding provided to students in 2023 via our Travel Support Scheme significantly increased from 2022.

On-campus subsidised accommodation	306 students	1,444 weeks supported	
Off-campus subsidised accommodation	127 students	471 weeks supported	
Placement Grant	316 students	1,255 weeks supported	Financial assistance for Charles Sturt students in lieu of accommodation.
Travel Support Scheme	109 students	527 weeks supported	Financial assistance for non-Charles Sturt students in lieu of accommodation.
Outreach Visit Support Scheme	16 students	24 nights supported	Additional financial assistance when completing outreach trips as part of placement.

Service agreements

Work conducted under the 2023 Service Agreement with Three Rivers DRH and the Faculty of Science and Health Workplace Learning Professional team resulted in:

- The university secured 245 additional Student Placement Agreements and renegotiated 102 existing Student Placement Agreements, with 44 of these placement providers directly located within our footprint.
- Support for various disciplines (nursing, paramedicine, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, exercise physiology and speech) with 411 additional placements sourced.
- An opportunity to refine essential reporting and procedures to support the work-integrated learning (WIL) process across the entire university.

Professional development



158 health professionals attended our training sessions, including **4** face-to-face days and **2** online webinars

We provided training to a further **328 health professionals** across **13** sessions at the invitation of our partners



Our Rural Health Education team provides free professional development opportunities to rural health clinicians and our partners, supporting them in their vital role in the health and wellbeing of our regional and rural communities.

During our professional development sessions in 2023, participants from nursing, physiotherapy, social work, speech pathology, occupational therapy, medical radiation science, dietetics and the disability sector came together to share their experiences working in rural health and explore mechanisms to enhance their practice.

The sessions explored a range of topics, grouped under the themes of:

- enhancing rural health practice
- rethinking student placements and supervision
- culturally responsive communication in health settings.

Feedback was received from 106 participants, and the sessions received a 96 per cent satisfaction score. In addition to providing a platform for knowledge exchange, these sessions also enabled networking between academics and clinicians, and connections between rural clinicians.

“One of the best educational activities to either refresh on or learn skills to be an effective leader and role model for students or fellow colleagues.” – Participant



1,287 certificates were awarded in 2023 for our free **telehealth** online course

Since first offered in 2019 **7,194** people have enrolled and we've awarded **6,087** certificates to learners from across 20 different universities and health professionals from nursing, allied health and medicine



461 completions of our free **rural placement readiness** online modules by health students with a 90% satisfaction rating

78 completions of our free **rural clinical supervision** online modules by health professionals with a 99% satisfaction rating

Rural service learning

Service learning is a form of work-integrated learning that combines experiential education, civic engagement and critical reflection.


Our service learning program is founded on the core values of quality learning and teaching, rurality and social accountability. During these placements, students provide a service to a rural organisation that meets a need identified in collaboration with the community.

Our service learning program is rurally based learning facilitated by our Rural Health Education (RHE) team. As an interprofessional team of educators across our rural footprint, RHE works closely with community to deliver high-quality experiences.

Each service learning placement aims to provide a resource to the rural community, with notable examples in 2023 including:

- the Girinya Project to teach, practice and assess fundamental movement skills of school-aged children (physiotherapy)
- group time activities supporting speech and language development for preschoolers (speech pathology)
- the Be Bus Aware project to increase client and worker safety during client transport with a home-care provider (occupational therapy).

In 2023, our service learning program was completed in partnership with two aged care organisations, six schools, two Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, two early childhood centres,



29 service learning student placements
with **18** organisations,
including 52% in MM4-6 areas,
hosting **56** students
from physiotherapy, occupational
therapy and speech pathology

five disability services, and one health service across 13 rural locations in our geographical footprint. Our evaluation data shows exciting outcomes, including:

- 94 per cent of students would recommend these placements to others
- 86 per cent of students agreed the skills and experiences were relevant to their future health career
- 100 per cent of host organisations agreed they would recommend hosting a Three Rivers DRH placement
- 95 per cent of clinical supervisors agreed they would recommend clinical supervision of Three Rivers DRH placements to other clinicians.

We look forward to continuing this program in 2024.

Clinical supervisors are vital to student learning

In 2023, we had the great privilege of working with several health professionals who provided clinical supervision for students undertaking service learning. The supervision provided by these clinicians is integral to student learning and is an example of how the university collaborates with the rural health workforce.

Cassie Mullins is an occupational therapy supervisor entering her third year working with Three Rivers DRH. When asked about her longstanding work as a clinical supervisor, Cassie reflected that sharing her knowledge and watching students develop their skills and self-confidence is the best part of this role.

Service learning plays an important part in a student's learning experience, and Cassie has watched many students grow during these placements. Stand-out student projects for Cassie were the development of

a preschool website that has become a valuable resource and an executive functioning program that promotes children's learning through self-awareness and the improvement of alertness.

Joining Cassie in 2023 were another 20 health professionals working across the service learning program from areas classified as MM3 (10), MM4 (5), MM5 (5) and MM6 (1).



Student placements

Paramedicine students at Henty Field Days

In 2023, we partnered again with the Australian Men's Shed Association to conduct health checks for rural men at the annual Henty Machinery Field Days.

Under the guidance of an interprofessional group of supervisors, 13 paramedicine students took part, using the 'Spanner in the Works?' men's health program as a platform to apply their skills, including taking blood pressure, calculating body mass index and having conversations about mental wellness.

Over the course of the three-day event, students conducted an impressive 566 health checks. The program has now run for four years, and students have completed over 1,200 men's health checks.

We have published papers based on our years working with rural men on this program, including evaluating our community reach and student learning opportunities.

The 2023 Henty Field Days provided the perfect opportunity to implement our Learning the Language of Rural Mental Health dynamic program for students to engage in mental health conversations.

Developed by our Rural Health Education team, the basis of the program is to use work-integrated learning as a platform to help paramedicine students learn the language of rural mental health, as they are likely to attend many calls related to mental health in their future practice.

Learning the Language of Rural Mental Health received two awards

Our innovative student support program Learning the Language of Rural Mental Health won the Change One Thing award at Charles Sturt and first place nationally in the Regional Universities Network (RUN) Learning and Teaching Awards.



13

paramedicine students conducted

566 men's health checks

in **3** days



Working with older people

We established a new multidisciplinary aged care placement program in collaboration with Navorina Nursing Home in Deniliquin.

The Aged Care Expansion Program aims to increase and enhance student placement experiences in the rural setting, specifically emphasising the aged care sector. As part of this program, students are immersed in the local community and receive support from our local clinical educator and mentorship from residents of the aged care facility. They also attend a cultural immersion activity with local First Nations community members from the Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre. The long-term goal of this expansion program is to increase the number of health graduates opting for rural and aged care practice.

Students commenced the placement at the end of 2023, and we have had four nursing students hosted at Navorina Nursing Home so far, with another 20 offers being processed for early 2024. The program is also gaining momentum in other facilities that will soon join us in hosting students, and we anticipate paramedicine and physiotherapy students will also become part of the program.

"One of my favourite experiences during my placement at Navorina Nursing Home in Deniliquin was listening to Gwenda, about her life experiences as a person with dementia.

"It was really eye-opening and gave an excellent insight into dementia and how it impacts people's lives. She explained the importance of patient-centred care and listening to residents about their concerns and issues they may have."

Kathryn Box, nursing student





17 students from speech pathology, occupational therapy, and pharmacy participated in Connecting to Country

Cultural immersion experience for health students in the Lachlan area

The Connecting to Country experience was introduced in 2023 and embedded in student placements undertaken in the Lachlan area as a practice of respectful connection and partnership with local Elders. All health students undertaking a Three Rivers DRH facilitated placement can participate in this program.

The two-hour experiential walk on Country led by Uncle Geoff provides a unique insight into the local Wiradjuri culture and the historical and contemporary issues faced by

First Nations peoples. Written student reflections provide evaluation of the experience with relevance to current healthcare needs and practice. All students reported a greater appreciation of culturally safe and responsive practice.

“I think there are so many things that health professionals can learn from Wiradjuri culture that can be utilised in everyday practice.”

Emma Florida, occupational therapy student

Community Mental Health Experience Program

Commencing in 2023, the Community Mental Health Experience Program (CMHEP) is a partnership between Three Rivers DRH and LikeMind (in Orange and Wagga Wagga). It involves a bespoke mental health work-integrated learning experience for social work, paramedicine and nursing students.

Students work alongside community mental health professionals, and community members with lived experience of mental health, and connect with outreach and in-reach organisations involved in delivering holistic mental health services.

Students deliver digital health literacy programs to consumers of community-managed mental health services within our footprint and are immersed in the activities of the community mental health organisation under the supervision of a dedicated clinical educator.

The CMHEP received a Charles Sturt Excellence Award in the ‘students’ category, and the program’s design and early outcomes were presented at the 9th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium and the Rural Mental Health Conference.

Early evaluation data shows an increase from 78 per cent to 89 per cent in student confidence in working with people who have a lived experience of mental illness and a 68 per cent to 84 per cent increase in student confidence in delivering information about mental health to consumers.

158 placement weeks for 38 students

in nursing, paramedicine and social work

Mental Health Education Enhancement Hub

Development of the Mental Health Education Enhancement Hub project commenced in 2023. The Hub will support students and health professionals during rural mental health placements and practice by developing various education enhancement resources.

Stakeholder and industry engagement has informed the development of the Hub, with our Mental Health team members undertaking several activities, including:

- extensive stakeholder consultation with the establishment of a Project Consultation Group with representatives from

Western NSW and Murrumbidgee Local Health Districts and Primary Health Networks

- additional consultations with students, academics, and industry leaders to identify the learning needs of students and inform resource development
- consultation with community members and peer workforce members who have lived experience of mental health.

The Mental Health Education Enhancement Hub is positioned for launch in June 2024!

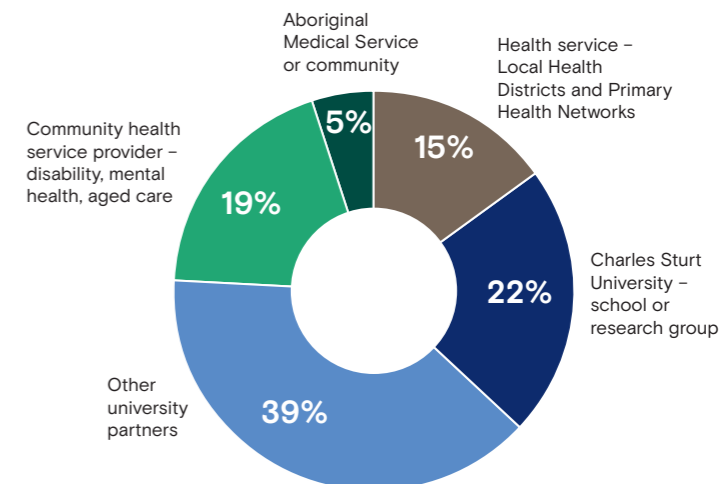
Our partners

- Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service
- Albury Wodonga Health
- Alpha Crucis Group
- Baptist Care
- Country University Centres
- Deakin University
- Flinders University
- Icaria Health
- Kids I Can
- LikeMind
- Live Better
- Manna Institute
- Marathon Health
- Murrumbidgee Local Health District
- Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network
- Neighbourhood Central Parkes
- NSW Health Education and Training Institute
- NSW Intellectual Disability Health Network
- NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
- Rural Health Research Institute
- South West Sydney Local Health District
- Sydney University School of Rural Health
- Therapy Connect
- Torrens University
- University of Newcastle
- University of Queensland
- University of South Australia
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of Sunshine Coast
- University of Technology Sydney
- Western NSW Health Research Network
- Western NSW Local Health District



Research

We partner with a range of organisations to conduct rural health research



We contributed to building research capacity in partner organisations by:

- providing professional development activities
- mentoring health clinicians at Murrumbidgee Local Health District, NSW Intellectual Disability Health Network, and NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service.

Our researchers led teams that successfully received **\$927,363 in external grant income**

The external grant income received in 2023 included the following programs.

Wellness 2 Age - HCF Research Foundation Translational Research Grant Program

Undertaken by Three Rivers DRH, this study aims to evaluate the benefits of the Wellness 2 Age Program in different rural and regional community-based services and evaluate if the implementation is feasible for these organisations to inform scale-up of the program more broadly across rural communities.

Evaluation of a Digitally Supported Self-Management for Chronic Disease Program - Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network

Undertaken by Three Rivers DRH and the University of Technology Sydney, the purpose of this evaluation is to identify successes and challenges encountered during the implementation of the Digitally Supported Self-Management for Chronic Disease Program as part of the Living Well, Your Way initiative for people with chronic disease.

ON-TRAC: Improving the Mental Health of Older Australians Navigating the Transition to Residential Aged Care - Ian Potter Foundation

This grant will support the Ageing Well in Rural and Regional Australia Research Group at Charles Sturt University to co-design, pilot, evaluate and implement a program to improve mental health and wellbeing of older adults transitioning into permanent residential aged care. This initiative is a collaboration between Three Rivers DRH, Charles Sturt University, Uniting Age Well, St Agnes Parish, National Ageing Research Institute, and Federation University.



We published

10 journal articles
and **1 book chapter**

with 50% in a Q1 ranked publication (20% in Q2+Q3 and 30% in industry journals)

The publications captured our 4 priority FoR codes, including the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing code



We delivered

19 oral and **4 poster** presentations

at **13 conferences**

across **4 states**



In 2023 we gained

2 new PhD students

and we now supervise 8 students



During 2023, we invested in strengthening the research knowledge and capabilities of our staff. Learning highlights include:

- Social Return on Investment
- Foundations in Trauma Informed Care
- Applied Statistical Procedures
- Data Driven Story Telling
- First Nations Cultural Safety Framework
- Embedding industry engagement and collaboration skills: the Trek Program

Conference highlights

The **10th Western NSW Health Research Network Symposium** in Dubbo saw us give one poster and two oral presentations, a keynote address, and provide scholarships to health professionals within our footprint to attend.

We sponsored eight travel and accommodation grants to support allied health and nursing clinicians to attend. Five recipients also presented their research, with two among the winners receiving awards.

Four of our clinical educators presented their work at the **9th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium** in Canberra.



Top: Three Rivers DRH staff at the Western NSW Health Research Network Symposium; Kate Freire, Karen Paxton, Kristy Robson, Melissa Nott and Ann-Maree Hartley
Above: Western NSW Health Research Network Symposium grant recipients Estelle Ryan, Merryn Johns, Linda Krogh, Molly Banks, Alison Devitt and Katherine Shannon

Joining the NAHGOT study

In 2023, Charles Sturt University, through Three Rivers DRH, joined the Nursing and Allied Health Graduate Outcome Tracking (NAHGOT) study with six other universities that receive Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program funding.

The NAHGOT study aims to understand why nursing, midwifery and allied health graduates choose to work in metropolitan or rural, regional or remote settings. As the longitudinal dataset grows, it is expected to contribute to education and workforce policy and planning, particularly in non-metropolitan settings in Australia.

Focus on First Nations students

A Service Agreement between Three Rivers DRH and the First Nations Student Connect team has been beneficial in fostering positive working relationships and focusing on health student enrolment and support activities.

The agreement provides funding to support two First Nations staff members who have responsibilities related to health students in our footprint.

The First Nations Student Success team conducted three health-focused Connections programs in 2023. The program runs over five days, during which First Nations prospective students attend the university, staying on campus with accommodation and meals provided. Participants undertake classes and are required to complete BKSB tests for both English and

maths, a written and oral assessment task (IKC), and an interview with the course director. The events hosted 23 students, with all gaining offers to health courses in 2024.

To support the retention of First Nations students, Connect sessions are available with both a cultural and academic lens. These sessions are designed to create connection

to culture and support First Nations students to succeed in their studies.

We provided scholarships to two students to attend the Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) conference and established cultural immersion activities for students in the Lachlan and Deniliquin areas led by local First Nations peoples, 24 students participated.



Lloyd Dolan, Academic Lead (First Nations), facilitated an enriching cultural walk for our team at the Yindjamarra Reconciliation Site on the Wagga Wagga campus. We gained a deeper understanding of First Nations peoples and cultures and strengthened our commitment to cultural awareness and collaboration.

Pathways

Focusing on rural origin and First Nations students, our Pathways team attend career-focused events across our footprint to provide insights into health career opportunities with Charles Sturt.

Our pathways coordinators aim to raise the aspirations of prospective students and highlight the benefits of studying and working in a health profession setting in rural and regional NSW.

- Delivered **20** Health Heroes programs with school-aged children, which included hands-on activities.
- Through our partnership with the Country Education Foundation of Australia, we funded **\$45,000** in scholarships for health students from rural areas.

- Over **\$80,000** worth of scholarships were awarded to Charles Sturt students who originate from rural or regional areas.



53

events attended, including

25

secondary school career expos

8

health career forums



Engaged with

3,000+ school students

Student rural health club

Rural Health Positive (RH+) is a student-led club funded by Three Rivers DRH to promote career prospects in rural and regional healthcare. RH+ is dedicated to building aspiration among students studying for health degrees, providing a support network, and advocating for increased uptake of health professions through rural high school visits.

The club engages with communities and also seeks to improve health outcomes for First Nations peoples through cultural immersion activities.

531

Rural Health Positive club members



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