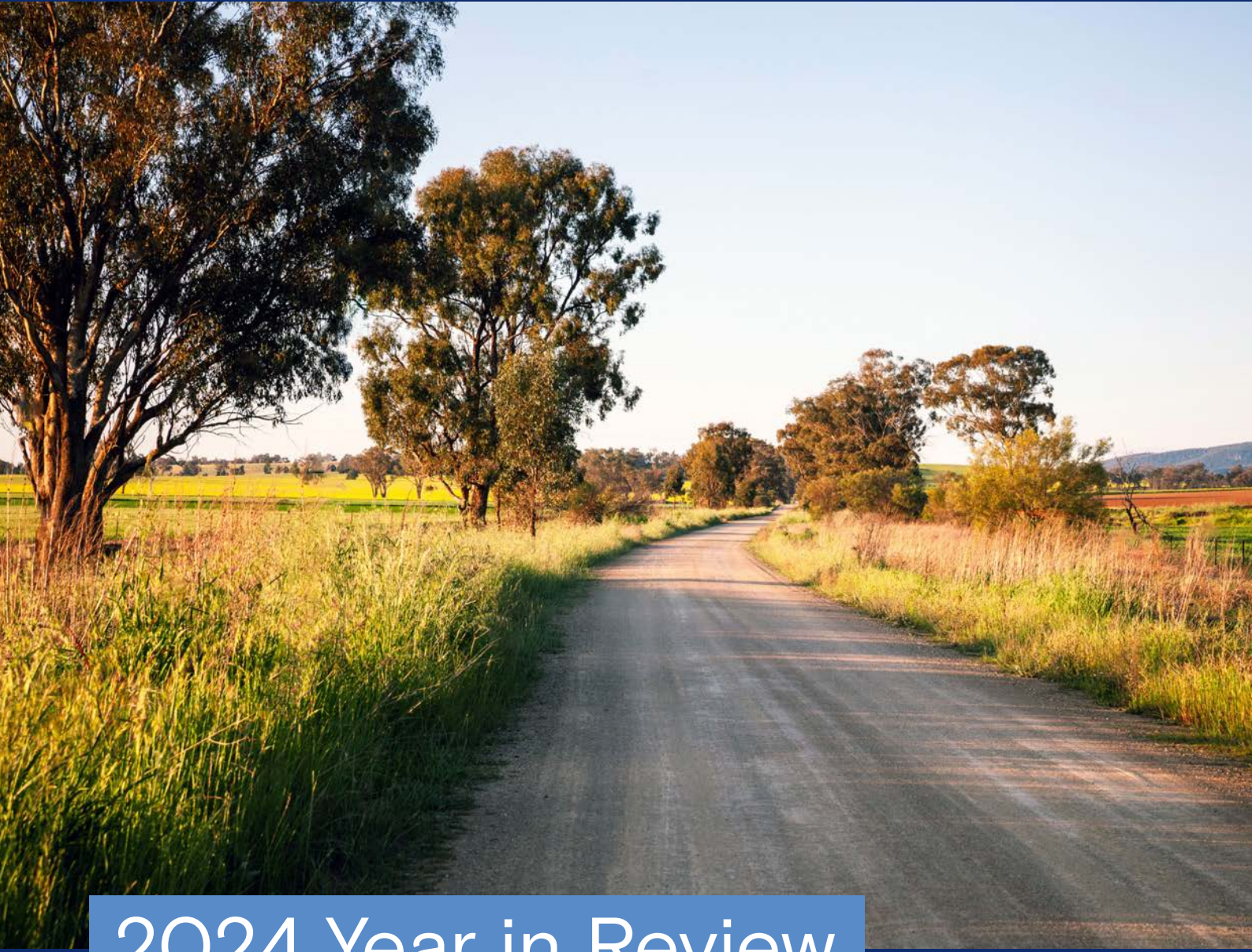




Charles Sturt
University

Three Rivers
Department of
Rural Health



2024 Year in Review

Supporting the growth and development
of the rural health workforce



Director's message

As the Director of Charles Sturt University Three Rivers Department of Rural Health (DRH), it is my privilege to reflect on an exceptional year of progress, collaboration, and achievement.

I want to acknowledge the Department of Health and Aged Care for their continued support of Three Rivers DRH through the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program. In late 2024, we received a contract extension for another two years of activity, with extremely positive indications of future funding from 2027 and beyond.

Our partnerships are numerous and varied, resulting in collaborations that cut across all areas of our work. I am incredibly grateful for these opportunities to work with other inspiring individuals and agencies who add value to our work to improve rural health and education.

2024 saw continued success in our two expansion programs for allied health and aged care. We are pleased to see the planned commitment from our Commonwealth funders for these programs ongoing. Additionally, our work in relation to mental health education and placements has matured, and it was a highlight of my year to see the launch of the Mental Health Hub in partnership with Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network.

The continued development of service-learning programs has enabled students to engage with rural communities meaningfully, addressing local health needs while gaining practical experience. Additionally, the success of simulation-enhanced interprofessional education (Sim-IPE) days is a testament to innovative approaches to education that foster teamwork and collaboration among future health professionals. The success of these initiatives demonstrates the value of embedding students in real-world settings where they can make a tangible impact.

This year, our research endeavours have focused on various areas relevant to rural health, workforce and education. These projects underline our commitment to addressing the health disparities rural populations face. Our collaborations with healthcare providers and local organisations have been instrumental in our research which is designed to be responsive to community needs.

We have prioritised cultural competence by offering cultural immersion programs and workshops that enhance understanding and respect for First Nations communities. These initiatives are crucial for developing a culturally aware health workforce that delivers respectful and effective care.

Our pathway programs and scholarships have been instrumental in encouraging rural and First Nations students to pursue careers in health. By providing targeted financial support, we contribute to the pipeline of health professionals serving rural communities.

To our Advisory Board members and the Allied Health and Aged Care Expansion Advisory Committee members, I would like to say thank you for your valuable time and commitment to assisting us with our various programs of work.

I cannot close out the year without acknowledging our staff. I am always humbled by the imagination, enthusiasm and energy that our team brings to every aspect of the work environment. I want to congratulate them on the accomplishments outlined in this Year in Review and the other achievements that cannot be captured here. I look forward to working with our team in 2025.

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 respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we live and work together. We extend this respect to all Elders, past and present.

About us

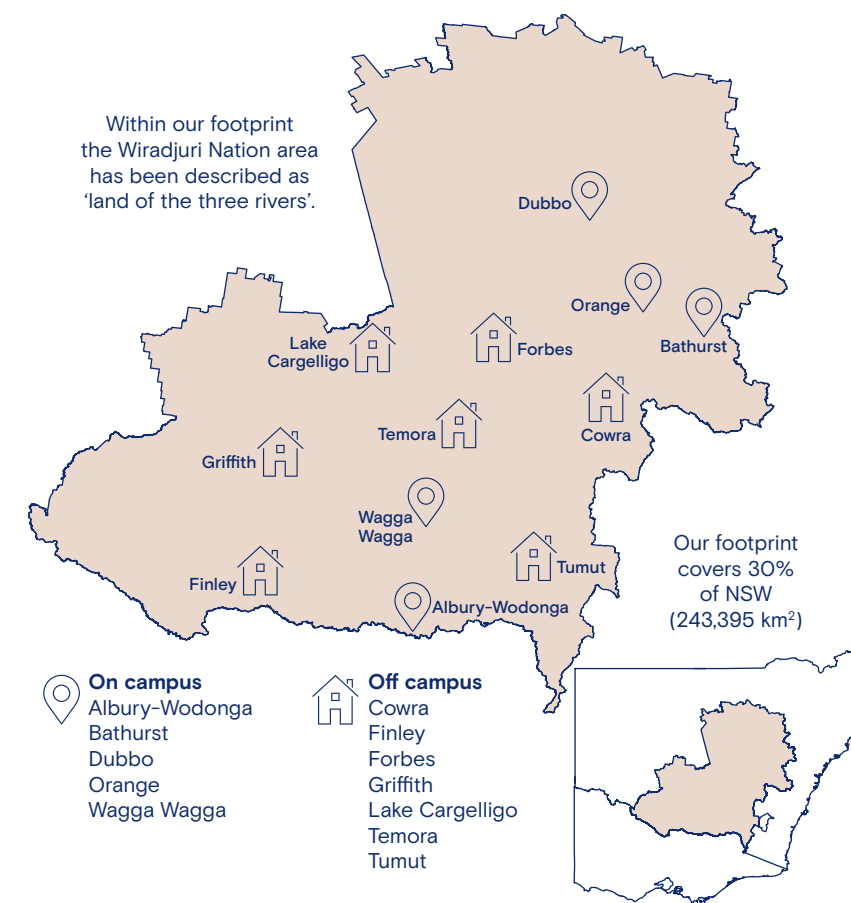
Charles Sturt University Three Rivers Department of Rural Health (DRH) is based in the Riverina and Central West regions of New South Wales.

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.





Live. Study. Work. Rural.



Student support

In 2024, we experienced a significant increase in applications for subsidised accommodation, particularly for on-campus accommodation in Albury, Wagga Wagga and Orange and financial assistance so students can source accommodation at sites where we don't have properties.

We invested in renovating our Forbes property to increase it to four bedrooms and two new bathrooms. Our team introduced two new financial assistance grants to support students undertaking placements in specific aged care and allied health locations.

On-campus subsidised accommodation	394 students	1,859 weeks supported	
Off-campus subsidised accommodation	170 students	670 weeks supported	
Placement Grant	364 students	1,444 weeks supported	Financial assistance for Charles Sturt students in lieu of accommodation.
Travel Support Scheme	91 students	447 weeks supported	Financial assistance for non-Charles Sturt students in lieu of accommodation.
Outreach Visit Support Scheme	10 students	18 nights supported	Additional financial assistance when completing outreach trips as part of placement.
Other financial assistance	53 students	Including the Rural Adventure Grant, Lachlan Allied Health Placement Bonus, and Aged Care Placement Bonus.	

Service agreements

Work conducted under the 2024 Service Agreement with Three Rivers DRH and the Faculty of Science and Health Workplace Learning Professional team resulted in:

- The university secured 234 additional Student Placement Agreements and renegotiated 84 existing Student Placement Agreements, with 87 of these placement providers directly located within our footprint.
- Continued focus on spreading placement locations across the footprint has resulted in smaller sites hosting placements across the disciplines.

Professional development

Our Rural Health Education (RHE) 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.

Education topics are chosen based on consultation with stakeholders in our footprint. We work with people across the diverse professions involved in the delivery and support of rural practice.

Education we facilitated this year included:

- professional development related to the specialty of aged care, including small group sessions on bedside handover, student facilitation and self-care, recognising and responding to delirium, and basic wound care for 39 health professionals
- our popular program on tough talks, boundaries and self-care was delivered to 74 health professionals in Wagga Wagga and Narrandera
- we delivered education on clinical supervision fundamentals during two sessions in Albury for 39 health professionals
- the Microbiology and Infection Control: Nurse Essentials workshop was delivered to 14 rural nurses in partnership with Associate Professor Thiru Vanniasinkam
- Rethinking Opportunities in Placements and Supervision was presented to 110 health professionals at the Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) allied health forum.

We also partnered with some organisations to bring training to our rural area, including:

- facilitating two clinical supervision workshops for health professionals presented by Clinical Supervision Services with 44 attendees
- collaborating with Going Rural Health to bring Monash's Peer Assisted Learning workshop to Albury and Echuca for 29 participants
- coordinating Dementia Training Australia's Navigating Changed Behaviours workshop in Deniliquin for 20 participants
- facilitating a subsidised rural offering of Occupational Therapy Australia's Environmental Home Modifications course for 26 rural occupational therapists (OTs).



241 health professionals attended our training sessions, including **13** face-to-face days and **3** online webinars

We provided training to a further **375** health professionals across **13** sessions in collaboration with our partners

"This was one of the most beneficial courses I've attended that will greatly benefit my confidence in having courageous conversations. Thank you so much." – Tough Talks participant



Sim-IPE: Understanding interdisciplinary roles in patient care

A collaboration between our RHE team, MLHD and Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD) resulted in two simulation-enhanced interprofessional education (Sim-IPE) days for nursing, medicine, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and medical radiation science students.

Fifty-eight students attended the events across the hub site at Wagga Wagga and satellite sites at Dubbo, Orange, and Griffith, which focused on clinical simulations of a patient who had fallen in a residential setting and sustained a hip fracture.

This program aims for students to explore interprofessional education and learning, broaden their understanding of other disciplines' roles and responsibilities in patient care and collaborate on patient care.

"It was a great day. The sims were very realistic and engaging. I learnt a lot about the role of multiple disciplines and how I can collaborate better in the future to improve patient care." – Student participant



New Rural Mental Health Education Enhancement Hub

In partnership with the Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network (MPHN), we officially launched the new Rural Mental Health Education Enhancement Hub in October.

The online training Hub is a one-stop resource for information and training related to rural mental health.

The Hub also delivered local professional development, including:

- Listening to Voices Performance: Held at the Riverina Playhouse, Wagga Wagga, this community-wide event brought powerful mental health stories to the stage.
- Listening to Voices Workshop: A targeted session for

educators, academics, and local service providers.

- Foundations of Building Trauma Awareness Workshop: An online workshop delivered by Blue Knot Foundation.

Since its launch, the Hub has provided rural mental health professional development for more than 100 local health professionals.

"It has been designed to be a comprehensive resource for mental health education, training and career development. It provides accessible, high-quality information and tools to support students and health professionals in rural areas." – Lucinda Derrick, Three Rivers DRH



Left: Professor Megan Smith, Christine Howard and Professor Renée Leon. Centre: Cristy Houghton (MPHN), Lucinda Derrick and Latitia Kernaghan. Right: Listening to Voices performance.



Advancing mental health placements

Our Community Mental Health Experience (CMHE) Program is a partnership between Three Rivers DRH and LikeMind (in Orange and Wagga Wagga).

Pre-post student surveys from 40 students who attended the CMHE Program indicate their:

- confidence in working with people who have a lived experience of mental illness increased from 58 per cent to 97 per cent
- confidence in delivering information about mental health to consumers increased from 47 per cent to 89 per cent.

168 placement weeks in 2023-24 for **54** students from nursing, paramedicine and social work

Rural placement programs

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.

Some of the fantastic resources created by our students include:

- 'Promoting Independence' module for staff at Currajong Disability Services – the project supports staff in working with clients to identify ways to enhance the client's independence throughout their daily activities.
- 'Active Animals' at Franklin Public School – through an obstacle course during lunch and recess, the project aims to improve fundamental movement skills such as throwing, catching, coordination, balance, and core strength with K-2 students. Resources include a screening tool, referral pathways, and a staff resource folder.
- 'Mighty Hands, Mighty Minds' at Franklin Public School – the project aims to improve engagement in

Harrison and Bree at Brungle Public School

The project, titled Winhangadilinya-nhumi-nya (Wiradjuri for 'Feel First'), used individual student emotional check-in wheels, emotional strategy cards, and a regulation station to educate children and teachers on emotional regulation strategies from an OT perspective.

This provided the school with sustainable resources to assist children to identify, communicate, and regulate their emotions.

The staff and students at Brungle were excellent placement hosts, and OT students Harrison and Bree, became a part of the community.



"I had the most amazing experience out at Brungle. The staff, kids, supervisor, and clinical educator made this placement an absolute dream. I can confidently say I learnt new skills that I was not expecting to learn and have developed my cultural awareness and how OT can be implemented into a variety of settings. Thank you so much for this opportunity, I couldn't have asked for a better start to my four placements." – Harrison, OT student

writing for K-2 students by creating fun activities that address specific fine and gross motor skills. A resource and guide for teachers and parents was also provided.

- 'Life Skills' program for adolescents at Trangie Central School – the program aims to improve students' independence in managing domestic tasks, personal finances and self-care.

13 service learning placements with **12** organisations, including 85% in MM4-6 areas, hosting **26** students from physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech pathology

Rotational placements

Rural rotations are one way for a whole community to host students and show them the opportunities available in rural practice.

Our RHE team has worked with many local partners to create and trial several of these models.

For example, in Forbes NSW, we hosted four first-year OT students who worked with 13 rural organisations across the local area. They had diverse experiences learning about practice across the disability sector, acute health services, rehabilitation, early intervention, telehealth, and palliative care.



31 students

from physiotherapy, paramedicine and occupational therapy participated in our rural rotation placement model, where students work with several organisations in a rural community to understand the breadth of rural practice and the available career pathways.

"The good thing about my placement has definitely been the ability to rotate. This gave me the opportunity to explore the broad range of possibilities in occupational therapy. Though I've struggled with the belief paediatrics is the be all and end all, this really helped me to gauge the broad scope of OT and understand I can take any direction I choose!" – Lara, first-year OT student



Health chats at Henty Machinery Field Days

Every year, we enjoy heading to Henty Machinery Field Days with our partners at the Australian Men's Shed Association and MLHD's Farm Community Counselling Service to undertake health promotion for rural community members.

This year, we hosted 15 first-year paramedicine students who engaged in a record 784 health conversations!

With a focus on rural men's health promotion, the students use the 'Spanner in the Works?' program as a foundation for their conversations. They complete blood pressure measurements, BMIs and discuss mental wellness using the K10.

This year, our team collected feedback from 60 community members about their experience participating in the health promotion activity and its impact on them.

The men told us that bringing health promotion to the community is vital, and they were keen to provide a learning opportunity for our future paramedic workforce. Notably, many of the men had visited us before, and the conversations had supported them to make positive lifestyle changes.

"Over the years, I have witnessed the development of this superb education program that I believe has come to the point of not only giving the students clinical experience and communication skills they will take with them into their chosen profession but also injects an excitement and passion for the role to which they have undertaken." – Stuart Torrance, Australian Men's Shed Association

15 paramedicine students completed **784** men's health checks and we conducted **60** research interviews in **3** days

Working with older people in Deniliquin and Finley

Our aged care expansion program in Deniliquin, Finley and surrounding areas has continued to grow, hosting 40 nursing, eight paramedicine and six physiotherapy students in 2024 across three aged care facilities.

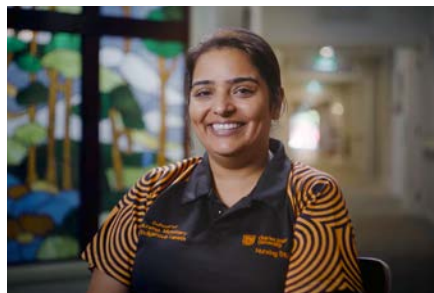
We have been privileged to work with Navorina Nursing Home, Southern Cross Care Orana and Finley Regional Care to offer this program.

Nursing, paramedicine, and physiotherapy students have been rotating through these sites, enjoying a dynamic learning experience and developing skills and attributes fundamental to their future practice.

We have exciting capital works programs that enhance the education spaces and resources available in the area, a professional development

program for local health professionals, and new placement models that showcase rural practice opportunities.

Importantly, we are working with five residents who are mentoring students on placement and guiding the development and implementation of our work.



"People are really great over here. Everyone is very welcoming, and you feel so safe and confident here, and you learn a lot.

"...in a small town, say like Deniliquin, it's a very good chance to learn your skills. So, what we have learned theoretically in nursing, we've been learning so far, and we know how we can apply practically in here.

"Deniliquin is beautiful! ... After work there's also a lot of activities to do. The community is really great. All people knew each other. They come and smile to you, they talk to you. This part, I really love it. I believe I will be working in the aged care after being an RN." – Manpuneet, nursing student

Cultural awareness and place-based immersion

Our broad cultural awareness and place-based immersion program aims to support students and health professionals across various points in their journeys.

We hosted three online webinars focused on culturally responsive communication in health settings and best practice frameworks for working with First Nations peoples.

These interactive sessions discussed the foundation for culturally responsive practice and supported attendees in reflecting on vignettes of health practice and discussing cultural considerations in different scenarios.

95 health professionals attended these sessions.

"Loved the practical examples and everyone's different thoughts around the videos." – Participant

"Great topic and love the interactive delivery." – Participant

We have continued our collaboration with Uncle Geoff Anderson in Parkes and worked with the Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre Deniliquin to provide students on placement in these areas with place-based cultural immersion programs.

13 students and 5 supervisors participated in our cultural immersion activities.

"This morning's cultural immersion was enlightening, fascinating and thought-provoking. It was quite emotional thinking about the people that came before and what they experienced.

"I feel as though I learned so much about the culture and practices and history of the Wiradjuri people and will view the land in a very different way going forward." – Speech pathology student

Thank you to our placement partners

We have enjoyed continuing partnerships with many local clinical supervisors and establishing new relationships with many more.

Rural clinical supervisors are vital for the growth of the rural health workforce, and we are grateful for their contribution to rural health education.

In 2024, several new rural supervisors worked with us on bespoke placement offerings, such as the physiotherapy rural aged care rotations we now offer in the Deniliquin area. Lynda Barclay, a local physiotherapist, worked with us to establish and supervise these placements.

Lynda believes "you've got every opportunity to take your career in any direction you want to go in the country," and she demonstrates this to physiotherapy students.

We look forward to continuing to work with Lynda and all our supervisory partners who showcase the opportunities of a rural health career and ensure our graduates are work-ready.



Physiotherapy students Joel Pocock and Suzanne Levesque with supervisor Lynda Barclay (centre)

"It was a great opportunity for me, and it's fantastic to see the students come out here. It's a great opportunity to showcase our town and our aged care facilities." – Lynda Barclay



In 2024, Julie Schubert completed all the requirements for her First Nations Cadetship with Three Rivers DRH.

The First Nations Cadetship program at Charles Sturt focuses on providing students with the opportunity to obtain hands-on experience in a professional area complementing their study area.

Julie is a Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) graduate and a current Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) student.

Since commencing with us in 2022, Julie contributed greatly to our team through her work to promote rural health careers and to assist in developing and implementing rural health education programs and research.

"My First Nations cadetship journey with the Rural Health Education team within Three Rivers Department of Rural Health took place from 2022 to 2024.

This has been an amazing experience for me and I would highly recommend this program to students considering an academic career.

"I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the RHE team for making me feel so welcome and the support and guidance they have given me. I have learnt so much from all of the staff while working together on various projects.

"I am very proud to have worked with a team of such dedicated educators and to be a part of the invaluable contributions to students and professionals' professional development has been extremely rewarding."



Research

We are committed to fostering authentic research collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders, including healthcare providers, communities and local organisations, to co-create solutions that are responsive to the unique needs of rural communities. Our projects focus on areas of community and health service identified needs.

Research in action

Mental health of older adults in rural Australia

As part of the Regional Older Adults Mental Health (ROAM) Study, researchers explored the perspectives of older adults in rural Australia around mental health, wellbeing and support.

Through interviews with six older adults and six informal carers, the study identified four key themes: the impact of perceived attitudes on help-seeking, the effects of social transparency in rural areas, the interconnectedness of physical and mental health, and the complexities of accessing support.

The findings highlight the stigma surrounding mental health, the dual impact of physical and mental health issues, and the crucial role of informal carers. The study underscores the need for tailored public health initiatives and policies to improve mental health support for rural older Australians to address their unique challenges.

This research, a collaborative project between researchers, industry partners, lived experienced consumers, and the Manna Institute, provides a foundation to inform future practices and policies to support better mental health care for older adults in rural settings.

Co-designed resources support children and parents in being physically active together

In 2024, evidence-informed resources were produced to support children and their families to be active together. The free resources can be provided to families by healthcare providers or accessed by families independently via our website.

Doing Physical Activity Together advises on the social, developmental, physical, mood, and brain gains of being active together and gives some ideas to try.

Planning Physical Activity Together supports families in making a plan together.

The resources were developed for primary school-aged children and parents to read and use together. They were co-designed with neuro and developmentally diverse children and their parents.

The project involved Charles Sturt researchers Kate Freire (Three Rivers DRH), Rod Pope and Kristen Andrews collaborating with rural families, paediatricians from the Murrumbidgee Local Health District, Riverina Paediatrics and Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network.

Virtual care for intellectual disability

In 2024, we collaborated with clinicians from NSW Specialist Intellectual Disability Health teams to focus on the delivery of virtual care to people living with intellectual disability.

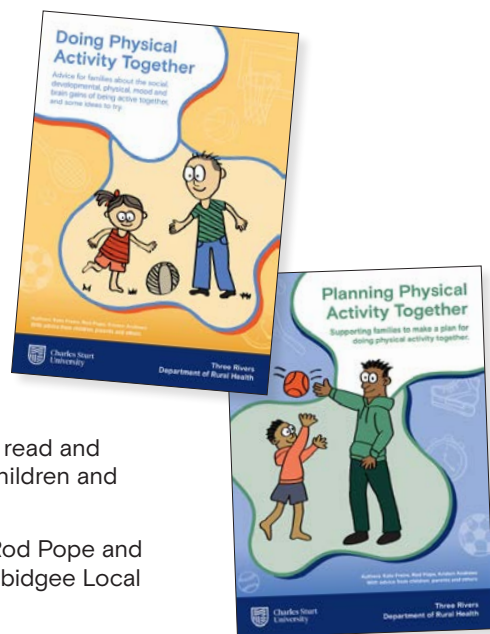
Central to the design of this project is a collaborative approach, informed by consultation with the Council for Intellectual Disability and an Aboriginal Reference Group to advise on cultural safety.

The study will explore the feasibility, acceptability, and resource implications of delivering virtual care to people with intellectual disability.

Early results suggest that virtual care is a convenient way for people with intellectual disability, their families and carers to access health services.

The project is currently in its second phase, measuring the potential benefits and costs of delivering virtual care.

Looking ahead, the next phase will co-design meaningful resources to support the engagement of people living with intellectual disability, carers and clinicians in virtual care.



Rural fitness for rural communities

Our researchers worked with Active Farmers to explore trainers' views about their community exercise classes.

Active Farmers is a not-for-profit public health charity, which focuses on improving the resilience of farming communities across Australia by supporting a network of trainers to provide low-cost exercise community classes.

Researchers consulted with Active Farmers staff to develop an online survey. The survey provided a snapshot into the community exercise classes that Active Farmers' trainers offer, the population groups who attend or do not attend classes, and explored the impact of Mental Health First Training on trainers.

Fifty-nine per cent of trainers completed the online survey. It found that trainers who had completed Mental Health First Aid Training felt better prepared to respond to class participants showing signs of distress. In addition, the evaluation suggested opportunities for Active Farmers to support their trainers further.

"Active Farmers is excited to be working alongside Three Rivers to gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs within our farming communities."
– Ginny Stevens, Active Farmers founder



We are leading or supporting **37** active research projects in partnership with university and health service partners within our footprint

External grant income

Our researchers led and partnered in seven external funding applications, resulting in \$1,543,720 external grant income.

Building capacity to deliver assistive technology solutions to enhance the lives of people with brain injury in rural areas.

This project is funded by Insurance and Care (iCare) NSW.

The project will transform access to life-changing assistive technology for people with brain injuries in rural NSW by building local clinical expertise, strengthening connections between practitioners and assistive technology suppliers, and creating sustainable support networks.

This project allows rural iCare participants to receive assistive technology solutions that improve their independence and quality of life closer to home.



Our research partners

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| Active Farmers | Murrumbidgee Local Health District | Sydney University School of Rural Health |
| Albury Wodonga Health | Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network | Therapy Connect |
| Alpha Crucis Group | National Ageing Research Institute | Torrens University |
| Baptist Care | Navorina Nursing Home | Uniting Age Well |
| Bond University | NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service | University of Melbourne |
| Deakin University | NSW Health Education and Training Institute | University of Newcastle |
| Finley Regional Care | NSW Intellectual Disability Health Network | University of Notre Dame |
| Flinders University | NSW Regional Health Partners | University of Queensland |
| Health Consumers NSW | NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors | University of South Australia |
| Hunter Medical Research Institute | Orana Southern Cross Care | University of Southern Queensland |
| Hunter New England Local Health District | Rural Health Research Institute | University of Sunshine Coast |
| Icaria Health | South West Sydney Local Health District | University of Technology Sydney |
| Independent Living Australia | Southern NSW Local Health District | Western Australia Centre for Rural Health |
| Kids I Can | St Agnes' Care & Lifestyle | Western NSW Health Research Network |
| LikeMind | | Western NSW Local Health District |
| Live Better | | Western Sydney University |
| Manna Institute | | |
| Monash University | | |





We published **26** journal articles, **1** textbook and **3** book chapters with 83% in a Q1 ranked journals
The publications captured our priority Field of Research codes, including rural and remote health services.



We delivered **15** oral and **3** poster presentations at **6** conferences across **4** states

Building research capacity

We actively contribute to research capacity building by supervising and mentoring students throughout the research pipeline, including honours, masters and PhD.

In 2024, we supervised two honours students to completion. Our team members currently supervise one masters student and eight PhD students.

We awarded two inaugural rural health honours scholarships to support health workers engage in research. We also awarded one inaugural rural ageing PhD scholarship. The successful scholarship recipient will be focusing on management of delirium in small rural hospital settings.

Leonie Parker

Thesis: Nurse-led colposcopy: A scoping review.

Tianna Bailey

Thesis: Promoting positive healing strengths and successes in mental health interventions for First Nations peoples – a systematic review.



Leonie Parker (left) and Tianna Bailey (right)

“Receiving the Three Rivers Rural Health Honours Scholarship in 2024 allowed me to reduce my work hours, focus on my studies and research, and benefit from the support of an incredible supervisory team.”

Research training and education

We are committed to designing and delivering research training opportunities that meet the needs of our local communities.

In 2024, our team partnered with Health Consumers NSW to deliver a research training workshop for clinician researchers focused on research co-design with health consumers and community members. Our support included funding community participants to co-facilitate the workshop.

Workshop participants shared their reflections:

“Power sharing – checking in that people feel heard.”
“Co-design is born from real problems and pain points.”
“Approach with an open mind and do not go straight into problem-solving mode.”
“Collaboration is key. Power shifting to make it all equal. Asking the consumer and patient what they want.”



Conference highlights

Our researchers actively participated in several key local and national conferences this year.

In September, three of our staff presented at the 17th National Rural Health Conference in Perth, sharing their research insights on aged care, co-design with families and children, telehealth in intellectual disability services and community capital generated by University Departments of Rural Health.



Dr Kristy Robson, Associate Professor Melissa Nott and Dr Kate Freire

In July, our clinical educators participated in the Australian and New Zealand Association for Health Professional Educators (ANZPHE) conference in Adelaide.

Nine staff presented on various topics, including professional development, cultural immersion, nurse tutoring, the impact of short-term health placements, interprofessional education, digital mental health education, and quality assurance in rural work-integrated learning.

These presentations highlighted our commitment to advancing education and research in health professions.

At the Western NSW Health Research Network (WHRN) 2024 Research Symposium in Dubbo, five research presentations covered the allied health workforce in aged care and physiotherapy students transition to practice, a social return on investment evaluation model, telehealth services and co-designed physical activity resources.



Dr Matt Thomas (Marathon Health) with grant recipients Shirley-Ann Merritt, Michelle Gray, Carley Lowcock, Alyssa Walter and Ngozika Ezinze; and Associate Professor Melissa Nott

Additionally, we sponsored five travel and accommodation grants for Aboriginal, allied health and nursing clinicians to attend the WHRN2024 Research Symposium.

Each recipient had not attended the symposium before, and three presented their research.



Dr Claire Seaman, Cindy Earl and Penny Patterson

Research award

Congratulations to Three Rivers DRH Research Fellow Dr Claire Seaman and Murrumbidgee Local Health District collaborators Cindy Earl and Penny Patterson on winning the Health Research Award at the 2024 MLHD Excellence Awards. Their work investigated Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS) Pathway Intervention Times.

Focus on First Nations students

We contribute to delivering various customised services and activities for First Nations students in health degrees.

Two positions are partially funded through a service agreement and support the following works:

- In 2024, two Connections First Nations direct entry programs were offered, with a significant percentage of participant interest in health-related study. These programs combine cultural and social activities with academic benchmarking and engagement with industry experts. On successful completion,

participants are offered a place in a degree rather than going through the mainstream application process.

- Aspiration building with First Nations students in high schools, including a prominent focus on health-related study, through Deadly Pathways festivals held in Albury and Dubbo.
- Scholarships for four First Nations students to attend the CATSINaM or IAHA conferences.
- Trial of option to join a First Nations cohort within the Bachelor of Nursing with some customisations of student experience.



14 students accepted direct entry into health courses

30 students joined the Bachelor of Nursing cohort



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.

Our Health Heroes program provides hands-on activities to showcase what is possible in health careers and demonstrate the roles and associated skills involved across various health disciplines.

The program was delivered 15 times in 2024, most notably the 'Be a Health Hero' initiative from the Wagga Wagga campus in conjunction with Regional Industry Education Partnerships.



53

events attended, including

26

secondary school career expos

13

health career forums



Interacted with

2350+ people

including prospective students, parents and carers, school careers advisors and staff.



Scholarships

2024 was our most successful year for scholarship applications. The Pathways team developed three significant scholarships and delivered funding to 22 successful applicants, totalling \$95,000.

The scholarships were to support commencing or continuing health students, with a dedicated scholarship developed to support commencing allied health students who originated from the Lachlan, Parkes and Forbes Local Government Areas.

“As a self-supporting student from a rural background, financial assistance has lessened the amount of time I need to dedicate to paid employment, allowing me to direct more time toward my studies.” – Madeline Irvin, first-year Bachelor of Physiotherapy student

“This scholarship has been a huge help to pay off some of my HECs debt, buy text books and pay off bills that I have been struggling with, which enables me to continue to study whilst working part-time and looking after my children.” – Leanne Pope, third-year Bachelor of Social Work student

“It has been immensely helpful with helping me afford the hidden costs that come with university: computer, amenities fees, uniform and overall livelihood.” – Xavier Brigden, first-year Bachelor of Physiotherapy student



Bringing health careers to the regions

We hosted the Lachlan, Parkes and Forbes Health Careers Forum at Red Bend Catholic College (CC). The forum involved students in years 10-12 from Red Bend CC, Condobolin High, Forbes High, Parkes High, Tullamore and Henry Lawson High.

This event allowed 72 rural students to explore various health careers with over 30 local health professionals, who kindly shared their insight, knowledge and passion through interactive workshops and discussions, showcasing a rewarding career in regional and rural healthcare.

Disciplines included nursing, midwifery, paramedicine, medicine, pathology, radiography, dentistry, oral health, pharmacy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work and psychology.

The event brought health career pathway guidance to the region, providing an initiative that is accessible for schools at no cost so students can make use of the many health courses and opportunities offered, including the Charles Sturt Advantage and First Nations Connections programs.

“Receiving this scholarship has helped immensely. It has taken the pressure of having to work full-time to financially support myself so I can focus on my studies.” – Madi Hopkins, first-year Bachelor of Pharmacy student



Student rural health club

Rural Health Positive (RH+) is a student-led club supported by Three Rivers DRH that promotes career opportunities in rural and regional healthcare. The club focuses on inspiring students pursuing health degrees, fostering a support network, and promoting health profession careers through outreach in rural high schools.

The club is affiliated with the National Rural Health Student Network, which represents the future of rural health in Australia. It also actively engages with local communities to improve health outcomes for First Nations peoples by facilitating cultural immersion activities.

“One of my biggest takeaways as a health profession student and outgoing President of the Rural Health Positive Club, is highlighting the potential of such rewarding careers in a variety of settings. There’s a lot of challenges, but that’s what makes it so rewarding once you find your niche.” – Jarrod Weinert, registered nurse, paramedicine graduate

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Rural Health Positive club members



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