



Charles Sturt
University

Three Rivers
Department of
Rural Health

Research Plan (2022-2024)

Three Rivers Department of Rural Health |
Faculty of Science and Health

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Contents

This document presents our third research plan, consolidating and extending our leadership in rural health research and research related capacity-building and engagement activities across our footprint. The research priorities of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program and Charles Sturt University's Strategy 2030 guide the engagement in and conduct of research activities by staff of Three Rivers Department of Rural Health.

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Overview

Three Rivers Department of Rural Health is based at Charles Sturt University in the Riverina and Central West region of New South Wales, encompassing the Murrumbidgee and Western NSW Local Health Districts and Primary Health Networks. Three Rivers Department of Rural Health has six major sites across our regional footprint: Albury, Bathurst, Dubbo, Griffith, Orange and Wagga Wagga.



Three Rivers Department of Rural Health was established in 2017 and is funded by the Australian Government under the [Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program](#). The objective of this program is to improve the recruitment and retention of medical, dental, nursing, and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia. This will ultimately improve the health and wellbeing of Australians living in rural and remote areas.

The Three Rivers Department of Rural Health works with our Consortium partners, The University of Notre Dame, University of New South Wales and Western Sydney University, and our regional stakeholders to achieve this objective through the following priority areas:

- Delivering effective rural training experiences for nursing, midwifery, allied health and dental students.
- Ensuring rural training experiences are of high quality.
- Developing processes to improve rural student recruitment.
- Engaging with the local community to support the delivery of training to students.
- Maintaining and progressing an evidence base and the rural health research agenda.
- Supporting improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
- Providing regional leadership in developing innovative training solutions to address rural workforce recruitment retention.



Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Research Priority areas

The following priority areas guide the research activity of Three Rivers Department of Rural Health in accordance with the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) parameters:

Maintain and progress an evidence base and the rural health research agenda by:

Supporting research into: rural health workforce development (including recruitment and retention)

rural training strategies;

innovative rural service delivery models to enable the provision of health services to meet community needs;

health issues directly impacting on rural people, with a focus on benefiting communities within the university's catchment area through the delivery of better health services; and

improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Universities should support rural research opportunities for their staff and students in accordance with curriculum requirements.

Collect and maintain data on rural workforce outcomes resulting from rural training activity through the RHMT program.

In addition to these priority areas, the [Evaluation of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training \(RHMT\)](#) program released a Final Report in May 2020 including wide-ranging recommendations including specific recommendations (15 & 16) to strengthen the research network of the University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH).

Through the RHMT program, universities be required to demonstrate that they are supporting rural research through the UDRH network by:

Delivering high-quality research training, skills development and research support to local health professionals, supervisors, students, and broader community stakeholders.

Developing regional consultative mechanisms to identify and respond to local research needs.

Through the RHMT program, universities be required to demonstrate how:

Researchers are mentored and supported to build their research capabilities and careers.

Targeted support and mentoring are provided for rural based early career researchers, mid-level and senior researchers to enable them to join established research teams to address national and global research questions related to rural and regional health and health workforce.

Rural research and teaching are recognised, valued and rewarded.

Collaborations with other RHMT program participants are developed and maintained to progress multi-site, multi-university and cross jurisdictional research to address nationally relevant questions and strategies for translation and dissemination.

Charles Sturt University Strategic Priorities

The Charles Sturt [University Strategy 2030](#) outlines a ten-year journey towards a vision to be Australia's leading regional university, advancing the careers of our students, inspiring research excellence and driving regional outcomes with global impact.

Purpose – Yindymarra winhanganha: the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in

Vision – Australia's leading regional university advancing the careers of our students, inspiring research excellence and driving regional outcomes with global impact



First Nations education, research and engagement is everybody's business

Values: Inspiring – Inclusive - Impactful - Insightful

In acknowledgment of the significant challenge of addressing rural health and wellbeing outcomes, Charles Sturt's research priority areas include developing opportunities for growth in rural health research through:

- growing strong partnerships with industry, government, First Nations, and regional communities
- providing world-class facilities and expertise in digital applications
- delivering excellence in research and innovation outcomes
- embedding First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing.

Commitment to First Nations Health and Wellbeing

As members of the Charles Sturt University community, we acknowledge the words of the Wiradjuri people, on whose land our university was founded, and share the aspiration of *Yindymarra Winhanganha*, the aim for us all to learn the wisdom of respectfully living well, in a land worth living in.

We acknowledge that we work and live on the traditional lands of many First Nations peoples and acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and the relationship between First Nations peoples and country. We commit to building and maintaining true partnerships with First Nations communities and peoples so that our research reflects our shared values and resilience.

Research Principles

This plan has evolved through the process of internal consultancy with Three Rivers Department of Rural Health Executive, Research Team, Rural Education Team and Operations Team. External consultancy and feedback have been sought from our Consortium partners and stakeholders via the Three Rivers Advisory Board. The values and goals expressed in this document reflect this collaborative, consultation process.

The research activities undertaken by Three Rivers Department of Rural Health reflect the values of Charles Sturt University, our Consortium partners, and our stakeholders. These principles underpin the type of research that Three Rivers Department of Rural Health aims to be “known for”.



Collaborative

Our research is with and for rural communities, integrating multiple knowledges through responsive partnerships with our stakeholders.

Sustainable

We actively involve our research partners in co-design to ensure meaningful and ongoing impacts for our partners and their communities.

Intentional

Our research is planned, purposeful and respectfully informed by the priorities of our partners, particularly First Nations people and communities.

People-focused

We are committed to building the rural health research capacity and capabilities of students, staff, and research partners.

Research Focus Areas

We undertake place-based research, in and with rural communities located across our footprint, focused on the three priority areas that underpin the RHMT program and Three Rivers Department of Rural Health: rural health education, rural health workforce, and rural health outcomes. ***Live, Study, Work in Rural Australia.***



Rural Health
Education



Rural Health
Workforce



Rural Health
Outcomes

Place-based research with rural communities

Rural Health Education

Researching education innovation that supports informed and inclusive future health professionals

This research portfolio demonstrates our alignment with the RHMT parameters outlined below:

- Supporting research into rural training strategies and
- Supporting rural research opportunities for staff and students in accordance with curriculum requirements.

Over the Research Plan period (2022-2024) this will be achieved through ongoing research and development of the Three Rivers Quality Placement Framework. An “Impact Framework” will be developed with internal and external stakeholders to enable the immediate, short- and long-term impacts of student placements on students, service partners, and communities to be systematically evaluated.

Collaboration with health professional educators will generate critical evidence for innovative, technology-based, clinical supervision practices that support health student during clinical placements in rural and remote areas of Australia.

Design, delivery, and evaluation of industry leading student training programs informed by experience-based co-design principles and participatory research methods to enhance mental health capacity and preparedness, rural readiness, and cultural safety.

Clear research pathways and opportunities for undergraduate students, Higher Degree Research students, First Nations students, and staff. Emerging and Early Career Researchers will be nurtured, supported and mentored, to create a highly skilled and capable community of rural health researchers.

Project in Focus

Our successful funding application under the Department of Health’s *Expansion of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program in More Remote Settings* will support the development of innovative, industry leading education experiences for allied health students undertaking clinical placements in the Parkes/Forbes local government areas. A community-partnership approach will be adopted for co-design, delivery, and evaluation of various educational offerings to prepare students for rural readiness and delivery of culturally safe healthcare in more remote areas of New South Wales.

Our research will explore the development, delivery, and impact of this student training from multiple perspectives including students, clinical supervisors, health service partners, First Nations peoples (local Elders, communities, and Aboriginal Health Workers), and the rural communities who engage with our students. Through this work, we aim to develop a *Community Impact Assessment Model* to better understand the value and impact of health student placements in rural and remote areas.

A research capacity building approach will create opportunities for local health workforce and community members to engage in research that is place-based to enhance the health and welling of each represented community.

Rural Health Workforce

Research that builds the capacity of communities and organisations to attract, retain and sustain a highly skilled health workforce.

This research portfolio demonstrates our alignment with the RHMT parameters outlined below:

- Supporting research into rural health workforce development (including recruitment and retention)
- Collecting and maintaining data on rural workforce outcomes resulting from rural training activity through the RHMT program.

Over the Research Plan period (2022-2024) this will be achieved through ongoing engagement and consultation with health services in our footprint, including Murrumbidgee and Western NSW Local Health Districts, Primary Health Networks and Aboriginal Medical Services. Areas of high workforce demand including Aged Care and Mental Health, will be focal areas.

University and health service partnerships for rural health research capacity building will be strengthened, exploring opportunities for conjoint appointments and co-location of staff to maximise research engagement of health workforce and Three Rivers Department of Rural Health.

Partnering with the UDRH network on the Nursing and Allied Health Graduate Outcome Tracking (NAHGOT) study, to inform better health service planning and ultimately improve health outcomes for regional, rural, and remote communities.

Project in Focus

In 2022, Three Rivers DRH will partner with Deakin Rural Health, Monash Rural Health, Southern Queensland Rural Health, University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health, and University of South Australia Department of Rural Health in the [Nursing and Allied Health Graduate Outcome Tracking \(NAHGOT\) Study](#). This research explores to factors that influence graduate decision on health employment including rural origin, location and duration of university placements, and practice intention with respect to rural settings. This longitudinal prospective cohort study links data on student experience and graduate outcomes with graduate practitioner data collected by the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency.

There is an urgent need to address the shortages of nurses and allied health professionals in rural and regional Australia. NAHGOT study findings will be used to inform education programs and workforce planning, particularly in regional, rural, and remote settings. These will support better health service planning and ultimately improve health outcomes for regional, rural, and remote communities.

Rural Health Outcomes

Developing and researching innovative health services which lead to healthier and more resilient rural communities

This research portfolio demonstrates our alignment with the RHMT parameters outlined below:

- Supporting research into innovative rural service delivery models to enable the provision of health services to meet community needs
- Research into health issues directly impacting on rural people, with a focus on benefiting communities within the university's catchment area through the delivery of better health services
- Supporting research that improves the health and wellbeing of First Nations people.

Over the Research Plan period (2022-2024) this will be achieved through ongoing research building the evidence-base for generalist and specialist service delivery in regional and rural areas across our footprint. Current and ongoing focus areas of rural health research include management of chronic medical conditions, improving mental health of rural communities, healthy ageing in rural communities, and supporting vulnerable groups within rural communities.

Research informing delivery of virtual care services via telehealth will continue to feature in the priority areas of Three Rivers Department of Rural Health. This will be complimented by evaluation of innovative, place-based services meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and communities.

Consumer driven health research with a focus on locally identified community needs is central to our research activities. Guidelines for engagement in community consultation, co-design, and co-research practices will govern the processes through with Three Rivers Department of Rural Health engages with community groups within our footprint, including working with First Nations people and communities.

Project in Focus

In collaboration with Western NSW, Murrumbidgee, South-Western Sydney and Southern NSW Local Health Districts, Three Rivers DRH has partnered with the Specialist Intellectual Disability Network to explore the effectiveness and scalability of specialist intellectual disability services delivered via a virtual model of care.

This research partnership has sought NSW Health funding under the Translational Research Grant Scheme to explore client outcomes, accessibility, scalability, and cost-effectiveness of delivering specialist intellectual disability services virtually. This two-year project will deliver critical evidence to inform the NSW Model of Care for Specialist Intellectual Disability Health Teams, who to date, have primarily provided face-to-face services. Establishing virtual care services may increase access for underserved rural populations in southern and western NSW, ensuring equity of access to specialist services not otherwise available in rural communities.

Reporting and Feedback

The Three Rivers DRH Research Committee meets monthly to provide guidance and oversight of the activities outlined in this research plan, including but not limited to:

- The development and implementation of research-related guidelines and processes
- Identifying research opportunities
- Assessing the merit of research proposals submitted to Three Rivers DRH for funding and support
- Provide informed, regular advice to ensure the satisfactory and timely progress of research projects led by Three Rivers research staff
- Advise on appropriate research dissemination activities and opportunities.

Research activity conducted by Three Rivers DRH is reported to the Charles Sturt University Faculty of Science and Health Higher Degree and Research Committee and to the Three Rivers DRH Advisory Board.

Review of research activities outlined in this research plan is reported annually to the Department of Health.

Conclusion

This Research Plan outlines the intended research activities of Three Rivers DRH for the period of 2022-2024. In line with the stated research principles and focus areas, we remain responsive to emerging opportunities and partnerships with existing and emerging regional stakeholders.

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Three Rivers Department of Rural Health respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the country on which we work and learn together. We commit to building relationships and sharing culture with First Nations peoples.

Charles Sturt University is an Australian University, TEQSA Provider Identification: PRV12018. CRICOS Provider: 00005F.