

TITLE: Building Tomorrow's Evidence-Based Clinicians Through Real-World Research -
Embedding medical students within clinician-led research to solve local healthcare challenges

ABSTRACT

At CSU, we are committed to developing doctors with an evidence-based practice mindset. Over the past three years, we have transformed our student research project into a comprehensive, authentic research program that prepares students to investigate, evaluate, and improve healthcare throughout their careers. The program was designed in response to the unique challenges facing rural Australia, including persistent health inequities and workforce shortages, particularly among GPs. Rural clinicians often work in geographically isolated settings and must respond creatively to local health needs. Research capability is therefore essential to inform practice, evaluate services, and support sustainable healthcare solutions. Spanning Years 3 and 4, the program requires students to undertake substantial research projects, including ethics approval, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. Research is completed alongside clinical placements, reflecting real-world practice. A key innovation is the requirement that every student partners with a local clinician at their Rural Clinical School site, ensuring projects address community priorities while building research capacity among clinicians. The program has strengthened research skills, scholarship, and community partnerships. Student projects have informed service improvement, generated culturally responsive evidence, and achieved recognition through conference presentations and awards. By integrating equity, innovation, and regional responsiveness, the program develops future clinician-researchers while delivering tangible benefits for rural communities.

Figure 1: Rural Clinical School footprint of the CSU School of Rural Medicine

