



MONASH
University

MONASH
RURAL
HEALTH

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2027

The *Monash Rural Health 2023-2027 Strategic Plan* was launched in 2023, outlining our School's future vision in rural health and education and setting our priorities for the next five years.

Access to healthcare, health workforce maldistribution and lack of rurally-based postgraduate speciality training are just some of the challenges rural Australia faces. We play a critical role in addressing challenging contemporary issues to deliver safe and sustainable rural healthcare.

Our plan provides the catalyst for innovative and collaborative engagement within Monash Rural Health, Monash University, our communities and our industry partners, to address current and future problems.

The primary goals of our *Strategic Plan 2023-2027* are illustrated below. Throughout this booklet, you will see these icons beside achievements and stories that align with these goals.



Build the future rural workforce through student recruitment, retention and engaging rural experiences



Increase access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to health professions education, and success and employment in their chosen field



Improve diversity and inclusion for staff and students



Build and strengthen links and partnerships in education and research across the School, the University and wider community



Increase the access and success of groups experiencing disadvantage with respect to health professions education



Grow funding for rural education and research initiatives



Undertake research that addresses the health needs of rural Australians



Download the Monash Rural Health 2023-2027 Strategic Plan at monash.edu/rural-health-strategic-plan or by scanning this code

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

MONASH UNIVERSITY acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which our teaching sites stand. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

A MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

In 2023, our staff continued to provide excellent immersive rural experiences for healthcare students studying within our footprint. Our sites engaged with local regional schools to increase health literacy in young people and to encourage them to consider themselves as suitable candidates for a healthcare career. Our Regional Training Hubs, working with our key stakeholders and health service partners, supported medical students and young doctors interested in research and rural careers. High-quality research is being done by our researchers and their collaborators.

A broad selection of stories of student experiences, research and community engagement have been provided in this review.

A highlight of the year was the School re-stating its vision and purpose with the release of our Strategic Plan for the next five years and our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework. Our Strategic Plan articulates well with Monash University's overall Strategic Plan, *Impact 2030*, applying the three main themes of Climate Change, Geopolitical Security and Thriving Communities to a regional and rural context.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework provides a structure for increased engagement with the First Nations communities across our footprint and creating a culturally safe medical workforce and school environment. The Framework was conceived and developed in consultation with the University's Indigenous Centres, Gukwonderuk Indigenous Health Unit and the William Cooper Institute, and community elders. We are steadily progressing the implementation of the Framework.

The year wrapped up with our annual Rural Training Pathway Congress, this time in Gippsland. The Congress was well attended by regional stakeholders and the discussions related to increasing rural training opportunities were highly constructive.

I sincerely thank our School staff, university colleagues, health service partners and key stakeholders for their efforts in making 2023 a successful and rewarding year, as reflected in our 2023 Year In Review.



Professor Shane Bullock
Head of School
Monash Rural Health



Explore more of our achievements on our Year in Review 2023 website by scanning this code

2023 AT A GLANCE



31%

incoming medical students from rural backgrounds



61

research publications



8,450+

weeks of rural placement for medical, nursing and allied health students



\$1.4m+

new & existing research grants & contract income



68,600+

nights of student accommodation provided



94

Monash medical graduates commenced rural internships

EDUCATING THE RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

Building the future rural workforce is one of our School's key goals, articulated in our *Strategic Plan 2023-2027*. We achieve this by delivering engaging and high-quality educational experiences within rural settings with the needs of rural communities front of mind. Throughout 2023, we have increased our support and opportunities for medical, nursing and allied health students to experience healthcare rurally and look forward to growing this with the support of our clinical and community partners.

PILOT PROVIDES EARLY EXPLORATION OF PRIMARY CARE CAREERS

Monash medical students in Bendigo learnt about life as a rural generalist and rural general practitioner as part of a new Future Focus Week pilot. Designed by the North West Victoria Regional Training Hub and Monash Rural Health Bendigo, this enabled students in their first clinical year to hear from rural doctors working in primary care across a range of settings.

The group toured Echuca Regional Health and heard from local GPs and rural generalists about the diversity of their work and regional lifestyles. Students also visited Rochester to see first-hand the ongoing flood impacts on the health service and spent time at Njernda Medical Centre to gain insight into their community-connected model of primary care delivery.



Monash medical students in Echuca during Future Focus Week.

The Future Focus Week supports a key recommendation from the Australian Student Medical Association to give early and repeated exposure to general practice and primary care to address general practice shortages and increase student engagement.



“Before today, my knowledge of the rural generalist program was limited and I didn't know how it was different from general practice. I'm now incredibly interested in this program and seriously considering applying to become a rural generalist.”

Anna Nowotny, 3B medical student

GAME-CHANGING APPROACH TO CLIMATE EDUCATION

Monash Rural Health academics Associate Professor Marg Simmons and Dr David Reser developed an innovative board game to prepare healthcare professionals for a future impacted by climate change.

Climate Disaster Response: The Game is based in part on the lived experience of Monash Rural Health staff and students, as well as healthcare workers practising in the Gippsland region during the prolonged 2019-20 bushfire season, and the severe floods in 2022 and 2023.

Designed to introduce students to healthcare issues they may face in a climate emergency, the game has different scenarios in which a group of medical students imagine themselves as practitioners in a rural or remote community during a high-impact climate event.

In 2023, the game was piloted for the first time with our Year A graduate entry students as part of an interactive workshop, with the gamified approach to tackling such an important topic well-received by students. Based on this success, the game was also played at an Australian Medical Students Association event for medical students across Victoria.

Given the feedback, the game will be taught early in 2024 to enable students to act on what they've learnt.



Monash medical students playing Climate Disaster Response: The Game.



INNOVATIVE NEW UNIT INSPIRES RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

In 2023, Monash's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science introduced two new Undergraduate Certificates in Aged Care and Health Care Essentials. These fully online courses were developed in response to the urgent need for workers in the care sector and supported by Commonwealth Supported Places, following the success of the Undergraduate Certificate of Mental Health launched in 2022.

Monash Rural Health staff developed a new elective unit 'Innovations in Rural Health', as part of these new courses. Sixty-one students completed the unit, with content focused on inequities in healthcare access and innovative approaches to address these challenges.

Over 280 students completed one of these Undergraduate Certificates in 2023, many from rural areas and who had also not previously completed any university study.



SECONDARY STUDENTS TEST DRIVE HEALTH CAREERS IN MILDURA AND BENDIGO



Monash medical student Olivia with a student from Henderson College.

Twenty-four secondary school students from across Mildura got a taste of study and careers in health by participating in the Med-Toring program run by Monash Rural Health Mildura. The program, which has run for over six years, connects local Year 11 and 12 students with current Monash medical students (their MedTors) completing a placement in Mildura.

Over four sessions, high school students explored potential careers in health by hearing from local health professionals. Participants learnt basic clinical skills, took part in simulations and attended workshops around the transition from high school to university, under the guidance of their MedTors.

In Bendigo, Monash Rural Health provided over 325 hours of work placement for local students across years 10-12. Students explored a wide range of fields including medicine, allied health and business administration. Shadowing staff and our current medical students provided participants with a unique insight into the Monash medical program and an opportunity to nurture their future career aspirations in rural health.



Explore more teaching stories on our Year in Review website

RURAL PHARMACY LIAISON OFFICER INSPIRES NEXT GENERATION OF RURAL PHARMACISTS



Rural Pharmacy Liaison Officer, Emily Griffin


In June, Emily Griffin joined Monash Rural Health as the Rural Pharmacy Liaison Officer (RPLO), providing support for pharmacists, pharmacy students, and interns across rural Victoria.

In just six months, Emily has led significant stakeholder engagement


across Victoria and identified high-priority areas for future support including availability of rural community pharmacy placements and professional development opportunities for pharmacy supervisors rurally. This, coupled with data collection around rural pharmacy student placements, support and rural pharmacy employment barriers, will guide the local RPLO program of work in Victoria in 2024.

Emily was also named Victoria's Early Career Pharmacist of the Year for 2023 by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and has used this as a platform to raise awareness of current issues for rural pharmacists.







65%
of Monash medical students spent at least four weeks in a rural setting



3,600+
weeks of placement for nursing and allied health students



49
Scholarly Intensive Placements (SIPs) completed



5
staff named Higher Education Academy Fellows

SUPPORTING THE RURAL MEDICAL WORKFORCE

The Monash Regional Training Hubs in Gippsland and North West Victoria optimise the opportunities for medical students and junior doctors to live, work and train rurally. In 2023, our Hubs delivered a strong suite of professional development and supported initiatives for aspiring rural doctors and rural doctors in training. Our Hubs continue to work closely with rural health services, medical colleges and local stakeholders to advocate for more rurally-based training opportunities to help attract and retain doctors in our communities.

RURAL TRAINING PATHWAYS CONGRESS COMES TO GIPPSLAND



Over seventy representatives from regional health services, specialty medical colleges, health workforce and community organisations, current medical students and junior doctors attended the second Rural Training Pathways Congress in Gippsland on Friday 24 November 2023.

Following the success of the inaugural congress in Mildura last year, the 2023 event was hosted by the Gippsland Regional Training Hub in Traralgon. With a focus on 'Rural Health Futures', the Congress provided a full day program exploring how specialty medical training can be strengthened in regional areas.

The afternoon's interactive workshop focused on identifying the community's major healthcare needs, college accreditation processes, and different potential models for rurally-based training. Discussions also explored bigger picture considerations for recruiting, training and retaining rural doctors - such as accommodation, connection to community and 'whole of family' support.

The Gippsland Regional Training Hub plans to work with regional stakeholders to continue these important discussions and advocate for more rurally-based training pathways and dedicated training places for rural students and doctors.

FUTURE GPs EXPLORE GOLDFIELDS' LIFESTYLE

Over thirty medical students and junior doctors experienced life as a Goldfields GP for the third annual Central Victorian GP Jaunt. Hosted by our North West Victoria Regional Training Hub and supported by the Loddon Mallee Victorian Rural Generalist Program, Rural Doctors Association of Victoria and local general practitioners, this program enabled doctors in training to spend the day exploring the central Victoria region.

The group visited several local health services and clinics across Kyneton, Castlemaine and Maryborough and tasted the region's thriving food and wine culture. The tour was led by local doctors and medical leaders, including Dr Mark Farrugia and Dr Richard Mayes (Goldfields Medical Group), Dr Sophie Ping (Castlemaine Health and Chair of the Loddon Mallee Victorian Rural Generalist Program Network) and Dr Dan Wilson, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria.



"This event was a way to bring together all relevant stakeholders from across the community, those involved in the delivery of healthcare in Gippsland and the specialist medical colleges, to encourage collaboration towards improving training for specialists in the region."

Associate Professor Rob Dawson
Director, Gippsland Regional Training Hub



Watch the 2023 Congress highlights video



INNOVATIVE YOUNG DOCTORS LEAD THE FUTURE OF RURAL HEALTH CARE AT DRIVERS CONFERENCE



The DRIVERS 2023 Steering and Scientific Committee

The Doctors for Regional Innovation, Vision, Excellence, Research and Scholarship (DRIVERS) conference continues to go from strength to strength, showcasing the breadth and output of rural health research and

creating a rural medicine networking platform. Hosted by the North West Victoria Regional Training Hub, DRIVERS is led by a committee of junior doctors across the Loddon Mallee.

This year's conference in Bendigo saw a record number of abstract submissions, and 61 presentations addressing topics ranging from lung cancer diagnosis and referrals in Gippsland, to experiences of end-to-end psychiatry training in Mildura, to the impact of financial insecurity on medical students during rural placements. A full day of presentations was followed by a gala dinner and the presentation of twelve awards, judged by a panel of senior academics and medical professionals.

2023 saw increased engagement from medical students, both attending and presenting at the conference - recognising DRIVERS as an impactful platform for sharing research, building their CVs and making important career connections.



“What’s great about a conference like this is that it demonstrates clearly that research has no postcode. It’s really good role modelling for medical students to see that they can access training pathways and keep their academic career going wherever they are.”

Professor Michelle Leech, Deputy Dean (Medicine)



Explore more stories from the Monash Regional Training Hubs on our Year in Review website

MONASH STUDENTS SUPPORT THE VICTORIAN RURAL GENERALIST PROGRAM

Four Monash medical students took on voluntary roles with the Victorian Rural Generalist Program (VRGP) networks in Gippsland and the Loddon Mallee, strengthening their commitment to future rural practice.

The VRGP is an end-to-end training program for the rural generalist workforce to train, work and live in rural and regional Victoria. Students Samantha Congdon, Sophie Fontaine, Noah Pallott and Rachel Sultana contributed to regular network meetings, providing valuable insights on the factors that draw medical students to a career pathway in rural generalism, to help shape strategies to build a strong workforce. The opportunity also allowed the students to learn more about the diverse role of rural generalists in the healthcare system and the advanced specialist skillset they require to meet the most pressing community needs.



Final year medical student, Rachel Sultana



103

doctors completed Stage 1 of the Clinical Teaching and Education Pathway



48

participants in DrJuMP Mentoring Program



15

CV boost bursaries provided for doctors in Gippsland



14

new episodes of Doctor What? Doctor Where? podcast released

ENGAGING WITH OUR REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

We know that working collaboratively and listening to the needs of our communities is critical to our shared successes and impact. This year, we have nurtured links and partnerships across our footprint, particularly with rural secondary schools and community organisations, to help address some of the most pressing health and education challenges in our regions.

LAUNCHING OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FRAMEWORK

The *Monash Rural Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework 2021-2030* was officially launched in Mildura on Tuesday 12 December 2023. This framework highlights our commitment to creating a culturally safe environment for our students and staff and developing a medical workforce to meet the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The framework has been developed over the last three years, following a World Café community consultation in Mildura in 2020, which first established the imperative of a localised framework to help increase the participation of Indigenous students from rural communities in healthcare degrees, as well as incorporating Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into our curriculum.

The framework lays out the blueprint for how our School will engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the Monash Rural Health footprint. The framework implementation is led by David Byrnes in the newly created role of Aboriginal Communities Engagement Lead. Work towards meeting the four framing pillars is already underway, including developing opportunities for Aboriginal secondary school students to learn more about careers in health through hands-on activities delivered by Monash medical students. Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj artist Tracy Wise created the artwork that adorns the Framework booklet's cover.

The Mildura launch event brought together Monash Rural Health staff, representatives from local health services including Mallee District Aboriginal Services, schools and community organisations.

Launch events will be held in Bendigo and Gippsland in early 2024.



Professor Shane Bullock, Kendall Livingstone, Associate Professor Fiona Wright, artist Tracy Wise, David Byrnes and Cathy Ward.

Monash Rural Health is committed to implementing this framework and focused on its four framing pillars:

- Upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and respecting students, staff and community.
- Increasing the participation and supporting success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and content into curriculum.
- Growing research contributions to address and serve the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Download a copy of the *Monash Rural Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework 2021-2030*



COOKING FOR CHANGE



Monash Rural Health Bendigo staff at Bendigo Foodshare.

The Monash Rural Health Bendigo team spent a day volunteering with independent charity, Bendigo Foodshare, thanks to a Monash University Green Impact grant.

Using surplus ingredients rescued from nearby supermarkets, restaurants and farms, our staff helped create 169 meals of pasta, soup and crumble, to be distributed to people in need. This was a wonderful opportunity to work together as a team, help reduce landfill and most importantly, give back to our local community.



3000+ HOURS OF SERVICE TO THE GIPPSLAND COMMUNITY



Monash medical students on placement at Morwell Neighbourhood House.

Monash medical students engaged with community organisations and groups across the Latrobe Valley, with the return of our valuable community-based practice program for the first time since 2019. The program provides first-year graduate entry medical students the opportunity to learn how community care and services are provided to people experiencing disadvantage in Gippsland.

Students were placed within a range of Gippsland community organisations and services, including Morwell

Neighbourhood House & Learning Centre, Churchill Neighbourhood Centre, Kurnai College and the Latrobe Health Assembly. The students completed a combined 3,424 hours of community service across Gippsland, gaining an understanding of important issues of social justice and equity.

We are thankful to the 20+ local organisations who hosted students this year.



MEDICAL STUDENTS GIVE BACK WITH MUSIC

The Monash Medical Orchestra returned to Gippsland in September for their highly anticipated annual concert, 'Music for the Valley' held at the Federation University auditorium. Over 60 performers - the largest group to date - from the Orchestra and Monash Medical Jazz Band performed a selection of music from film and Broadway as well as classical arrangements, led by the Orchestra's long-time conductor, Robert Dora.

A highlight was the involvement of the Kurnai College secondary school orchestra in this year's concert for the first time. The Triquetrium Trio and Nexus Quartet from the Orchestra also played a series of smaller concerts for

local community members in Moe, Morwell and Budgeree, giving access to classical music for people in outlying regions.

The concert marked the Orchestra's seventh visit to Gippsland and acknowledged the important role of the region within the Monash medical program. Each year, over 200 Monash medical students complete clinical placements in Gippsland and over 100 first-year students in the graduate entry medical program study at the Monash Rural Health Churchill campus.



Professor Shane Bullock and Associate Professor Marianne Tare from Monash Rural Health, conductor Robert Dora, Cr Kellie O'Callaghan (Latrobe City Council) and Professor Andrew O'Loughlin (Federation University) with the Monash Medical Orchestra and Jazz Band.

FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS EXPLORE EXCITING CAREERS IN HEALTH

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the Clontarf Academy at Mildura Senior College spent a morning at Monash Rural Health in Mildura exploring potential careers in health and medicine.

The Clontarf students took part in a practical skills session in the Monash Rural Health Mildura clinical simulation centre and tried their hands at applying plaster casts, guided by four of our current medical students.

Indigenous students from Warragul Regional College also gained an understanding of the critical roles they could play in healthcare with a health careers day at Monash Rural Health Warragul. The students heard inspiring stories from three Gippsland-based Indigenous health professionals about their careers in nursing, social work and community health, and had the opportunity to learn CPR in the clinical skills lab.



Students from Clontarf Academy with Monash medical students in Mildura.

“Having health care professionals from First Nations backgrounds is key to creating culturally safe care for local communities - getting students to consider potential careers in health is an important first step.”

David Byrnes, Aboriginal Communities Engagement Lead



Explore more stories on our Year in Review website

CREATING IMPACT THROUGH RESEARCH

Leading rural health research is a key strategy identified in the *Monash Rural Health Strategic Plan 2023-2027* and we are committed to conducting high-quality research that investigates important issues in rural health. In 2023, we worked on developing the *Monash Rural Health Research Strategy for 2023-27* to set our research priorities for the next five years, and look forward to releasing this strategy in early 2024.

SIGNIFICANT BOOST FOR RESEARCH ON ILLICIT DRUGS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

Research into the health needs of people who use illicit drugs in rural Victoria, led by Monash Rural Health and the Burnet Institute, will be expanded to Mildura with funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

Injecting drug use and methamphetamine smoking account for the majority of illicit drug-related harms and associated healthcare costs in Australia. The Methamphetamine and Injecting Drug Use Cohort Study (MIXMAX) will produce new evidence on the nature and extent of these harms and the effectiveness of interventions to address them.

Associate Professor Bernadette Ward from Monash Rural Health and Professor Paul Dietze from the Burnet Institute travelled to Mildura in November and met with staff at Mildura Base Public Hospital, Mallee



District Aboriginal Services and community members at a public event to launch the study.

Associate Professor Bernadette Ward and Professor Paul Dietze (far right) with staff at Mallee District Aboriginal Services.

Participant recruitment for the study will commence in 2024 with locally-based research officers to be hired to support the five-year project.



FUNDING REQUIRED FOR DISASTER PLANNING FOR RURAL PREGNANT WOMEN AND NEW MUMS

A landmark study of rural maternal and child health nurses, conducted by Monash Rural Health, found that pregnant women and new mums are significantly impacted by disasters and need to be considered in disaster planning.

Published in the *Journal of Public Health*, lead researcher Dr Rochelle Hine surveyed maternal and child health nurses across the Gippsland and Ovens Murray regions, which were severely impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. The study revealed that natural disasters exacerbate stressors on perinatal rural women and can impede their access to formal and informal support, which in turn impacts their mental health outcomes.

Dr Hine called for targeted investment in rural perinatal services to enable proactive planning and implementation of disaster strategies to reduce the impact of natural disasters on rural perinatal women and their families.



“As the needs of perinatal women cannot be postponed until the disaster period has passed, there is an urgent need to improve understanding of the mental health needs, experiences, and challenges of perinatal women during times of disaster so that systems and services are prepared.”

Dr Rochelle Hine, Lead researcher

MAKING CARDIAC SERVICES MORE ACCESSIBLE

Interim findings from the Equal Hearts study, which explores how accessible cardiac services are for disadvantaged groups, have highlighted the need for better service integration and culturally safe care.

Focus groups of over 40 cardiac patients from four Victorian health services including Northern Health, Grampians Health, Colac Area Health and the Victorian Heart Hospital were conducted. These identified a range of issues including difficult transitions from hospital to home, lack of personalised information in hospitals, poor communication between hospital and local health providers for ongoing care, challenges with referrals to cardiac rehabilitation for rural patients and additional challenges in access to specialist and GP appointments.

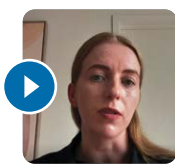
The team, led by Associate Professor Alison Beauchamp will use these findings to co-design and test an intervention that addresses the accessibility of cardiac care. Improving services for rural patients and people from culturally diverse backgrounds is vitally important, as these are often the people who need these services the most.



GENDER GAP HIGHLIGHTED AMONG RURAL GENERAL SURGEONS

The first study of rural female general surgeons was led by Monash University alumna Dr Jess Paynter and Associate Professor Janelle Brennan and received national media attention, highlighting the need for an urgent review of workforce recruitment.

Watch the interview



“Creating cardiac services that are user-friendly and equitable for everyone that uses them means making them culturally appropriate and acceptable, with information that is easy to understand, and help patients trust that their needs will be met.”

Associate Professor Alison Beauchamp
Lead investigator, Equal Hearts study

The research was published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery* following an extensive survey of 36 female rural general surgeons across Australia – surprisingly representing just over half of all female rural general surgeons nationally. The study found that 21% of the Australian general surgery workforce are female, and only 16% of the rural general surgery workforce are female. Key barriers to working rurally were distance, workload due to workforce insufficiencies and volume of on-call work, highlighting the need for flexible working conditions to attract and retain female rural general surgeons.



\$6.4m+
new multi-year research grants & contracts awarded

\$1.4m+
new & existing research grants & contract income

61
new research publications

1 PhD student completion
1 honours student completion



Explore more research stories on our Year in Review website

CONTACT US

Monash Rural Health

monash.edu/rural-health

E rural.health@monash.edu

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