



MONASH
University

MONASH
RURAL
HEALTH

2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

CELEBRATING OUR MILESTONES

THIRTY YEARS OF MONASH RURAL HEALTH

2022 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Monash University's School of Rural Health. From the cleaner's cupboard at the old Moe Hospital to now being Australia's oldest and largest rural clinical school with eight teaching sites across Victoria, we are proud of our ongoing commitment to improving health outcomes for our communities.

This milestone provided the opportunity to celebrate our achievements with our staff and reflect on the vision for our School for the next four years, with the development of a new strategic plan to be released in 2023.

Monash Rural Health staff at the School's 30th-anniversary lunch



TEN YEARS OF GRADUATE MEDICINE IN GIPPSLAND

During the year, we celebrated ten years of Monash University's graduate entry medicine program in Gippsland. Alumni, current students and staff, health service representatives and community stakeholders celebrated in Traralgon. Many graduates from the program are currently living and practising in Gippsland, highlighting the long-term benefits of rurally-based training on the health workforce.

Monash graduates, students, staff and supporters celebrating



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 2022 we emerged from an intense period of pandemic-related lockdowns back into a world with more mobility and face-to-face interactions. The SARS-CoV-2 virus was still present, but with vaccination available and a range of novel medications we were able to move around more freely. I acknowledge and pay tribute to the healthcare workers within our communities who worked tirelessly to deliver care during the pandemic. I also thank our School staff for the way in which they faced the professional and personal challenges of the pandemic. Indeed a number of the features of living with COVID-19 were retained within the University, with staff working some of the time from home, greater use of Zoom videoconferencing for meetings and increased consideration given to hybrid online/face-to-face teaching strategies.

The year brought opportunities to celebrate significant milestones - the 30th anniversary for our School and the 10th anniversary of the graduation of the first graduate entry medicine cohort from Churchill. Fittingly the year also marked the first intake of students into the Gippsland Partnership Program, a collaboration between Monash and Federation Universities.

Through the year we were able to physically place more medical, nursing and allied health students in our rural communities to support the recruitment of the rural health workforce. There are great stories about our students engaging with the rural communities and health services during their placements. Our support for young doctors to enable them to participate in professional development, research and scholarship continued and we worked closely with our partner health services and specialist medical colleges to increase rural postgraduate training opportunities.

A number of our research and evaluation projects are yielding positive impacts on the health outcomes of our communities and we are pleased to report on the progress of selected projects in this review.

To our stakeholders, I thank you for the strong partnerships that we have developed with you over the years that continue to benefit the communities in which we live and work.

I hope you enjoy reading our Year in Review.



Professor Shane Bullock

Head of School
Monash Rural Health

2022 AT A GLANCE



32%

incoming medical students
from rural backgrounds



67

research publications



500+

medical, nursing and allied
health students supported
on rural clinical placements



80+

Monash medical graduates
began rural internships

Explore more of our achievements and stories on our Year in Review 2022 website by visiting monash.edu/rural-health-year-in-review or by scanning the code below



TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

This year marked the 30th anniversary of our School delivering medical education in rural Victoria. Our commitment to delivering high quality educational experiences within rural settings remains strong, and we are grateful to our ongoing clinical and teaching partnerships that allow us to achieve this. We have also continued to increase our support and opportunities for nursing and allied health students to experience healthcare within rural communities, and look forward to growing this further in 2023, particularly in mental health and aged care, through our Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program expansion grant.

A NEW PATHWAY TO MEDICINE ANNOUNCED IN GIPPSLAND

This year we were excited to welcome the first intake of Bachelor of Biomedical Science (Gippsland Partnership Program) students.

Delivered in partnership with Federation University, this new program allows Gippsland origin students to complete the majority of their undergraduate studies locally at the Churchill campus. Students will be able to apply for the Monash graduate entry medical program in their final year of studies, providing a new end-to-end pathway for aspiring doctors who want to study, live and work in the Gippsland region.

*Gippsland Partnership Program students
Annalise Gafa and Henry Bird*



YEAR 2 PROGRAM RETURNS, BRINGING STUDENTS TO REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

In 2022, 240 Year 2 Monash medical students had the opportunity to experience life in regional Victoria for a week ahead of their clinical years. We were excited to welcome students back to our regions through this program, after being impacted by COVID-19 restrictions over the last two years. Students spent time in local GP clinics shadowing general practitioners, attended ward rounds at regional hospitals, practised suturing skills in the Monash Rural Health clinical skills labs and received a cultural orientation by Traditional Owner groups.

The program also provided students with the opportunity to engage with local community services and organisations - from meeting with State Emergency Services in East Gippsland and the Country Fire Authority in Warragul to dairy farm visits in Bendigo and Gippsland and a trip to Orange World in Mildura. As some students have never spent time outside of a major city, the Year 2 program plays an important role in influencing where our students undertake long-term rural placements, as well as potentially their career pathways - where the benefits to our local rural communities will be seen for years to come.

We look forward to extending the Year 2 Rural Placement Program to all Year 2 medical students in 2023.



INAUGURAL END-TO-END RURAL COHORT EXPERIENCE THE LODDON MALLEE

Our first 30 End-to-End Rural Cohort students began their first year of clinical placements and were warmly welcomed to Bendigo and Mildura in 2022. After completing their first year studying in Churchill, this cohort will now spend at least two and a half years of their clinical medical training within north-west Victoria.

While in the Loddon Mallee region, the inaugural End-to-End Cohort enjoyed exploring the lifestyle on offer - from canoeing on the Murray River, training with the Mildura State Emergency Service Unit to working at local businesses. The group was supported throughout the year by a dedicated Cohort Coordinator, and through their connection to the newly established Community Advisory Committees.

The End-to-End Rural Cohort is funded by the Australian Government under the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network.

End-to-End Rural Cohort students explore the Loddon Mallee



70%
of Monash medical students spent at least four weeks in a rural setting

2120
placement weeks for nursing and allied health students

8 teaching sites and **25** community placement sites across regional Victoria

Explore more of our teaching stories and student experiences on our Year in Review webpage

STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH WORKFORCE IN SUNRAYSLIA

The Sunraysia Collaboration - a joint venture between Monash Rural Health Mildura and the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (University of Sydney) - was officially launched on Tuesday 14 June 2022 in Wentworth. Bringing together shared experiences with the challenges of geographical locations and cross-border healthcare access, the Sunraysia Collaboration was established to support Sunraysia communities and address healthcare needs across the region.

Through the work of the Sunraysia Collaboration, nursing and allied health student placement activity in the region increased from 150 weeks in 2018 to over 400 weeks in 2022. This growth included an increased breadth of disciplines, with new placements enabling speech pathology and nursing students to spend extended time in the region, and service-learning placements established in primary schools. There were also increased student placements in smaller towns across the Sunraysia area, such as Robinvale and Balranald.

Members from the Sunraysia Collaboration at the launch event in Wentworth



Monash nursing and midwifery students participating in learning activities while on placement



SUPPORTING THE REGIONAL MEDICAL WORKFORCE

The Monash Regional Training Hubs in Gippsland and North West Victoria support medical students and junior doctors to live, work and train rurally. Working closely with the regional health services within our footprint and the medical colleges, our Hubs continue to increase rural postgraduate training opportunities, coordinate local professional development and promote rural internships to medical students.

NEW PATHWAY BOOSTS TEACHING AND SUPERVISORY SKILLS

Following a successful pilot in 2021, our Clinical Teaching and Education Pathway was rolled out for the first time across our entire geographical footprint, sponsored by the two Monash Regional Training Hubs. The program is designed to strengthen teaching and supervisory capacities among doctors working within regional health services. Over fifty regional doctors from across the Loddon Mallee and Gippsland regions participated in stage one of the program in 2022.

Following the successful completion of stage one of the course, twenty doctors were supported by the Monash Regional Training Hubs to complete stage two - a full-day course delivered by the Monash Centre for Scholarship in Health Education with a focus on quality supervision. Doctors who completed this training are prioritised for education positions with Monash Rural Health and regional health services.



Clinical Teaching and Education sessions in action in Bendigo and Gippsland

REGIONAL MEDICAL RESEARCH CELEBRATED AT DRIVERS CONFERENCE

From the gender gap in rural general surgery, to spiked helmet signs, to the applications of space medicine, the second Doctors for Regional Innovation, Vision, Excellence, Research and Scholarship (or DRIVERS) conference showcased the potential of regional medical research.

Hosted by Monash's North West Victorian Regional Training Hub on Saturday 22 October, DRIVERS 2022 brought together regional medical students, junior doctors and clinicians from across south east Australia to share their scientific, reflective and case study presentations.

Over 40 presenters covered a broad range of topics, all focused on improving health outcomes for rural communities. Three inspiring keynote speakers - Dr Dinesh Palipana, Associate Professor Matthias Wichmann and Dr Sarah Van Der Wal - generously shared their insights on happiness, resilience and collaboration. Ten scientifically peer-reviewed awards were presented at the DRIVERS gala dinner in the evening.



Building on the success of the inaugural DRIVERS conference in 2021, this event provided an important platform for regional doctors and medical students to share their research with an audience of their peers. The conference also provided Loddon Mallee-based junior doctors the opportunity to take on leadership roles, as part of the DRIVERS Steering and Scientific committees.

Following the tremendous success of the conference this year, DRIVERS will run again on 23 September 2023.

DRIVERS 2022 Scientific and Steering Committee members with Professor Shane Bullock and North West Victorian Regional Training Hub Director Associate Professor Janelle Brennan

Watch the highlights from DRIVERS 2022



INAUGURAL RURAL TRAINING PATHWAYS CONGRESS OPENS UP NEW DISCUSSIONS FOR REGIONAL MEDICINE CAREERS

The inaugural Rural Training Pathways Congress: 'Re-invigorating the Rural Medical Workforce' event was held in Mildura on 9 December 2022. The event brought together over 60 medical students, junior doctors, representatives from regional health services and supporting organisations to discuss new training pathways in regional medicine.

Hosted by the Monash Regional Training Hubs, the event also provided a showcase of the Mildura region, as young doctors had the opportunity to explore the region's health services and experience the local community. Senior clinicians and representatives from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Australian College for Rural and Remote Medicine and regional health services shared successes with existing regional training programs, such as end-to-end psychiatry training in Mildura.

Following the success of this event, the Monash Regional Training Hubs will bring the Rural Training Pathways Congress to Gippsland in 2023.

Rural Training Congress attendees tour Mildura Base Public Hospital and network over lunch at Trentham Estate



Hear what attendees had to say about the inaugural Rural Training Pathways Congress



RURAL DOCTORS' CAREERS GIVEN A BOOST WITH BURSARY FUNDING

Sixteen junior doctors in Gippsland and the Loddon Mallee received a boost to their careers, receiving bursaries sponsored by the Monash Regional Training Hubs in 2022. These bursaries directly assist regionally-based medical trainees to access training and professional development, attend conferences or cover publication costs directly related to their specialist training programs. The bursaries funded opportunities such as Fellowship exam preparation, courses in Emergency Trauma Management, Preparation in Maternity Safety, and Advanced Life Support, and attendance at the Annual Science Meeting of the College of Intensive Care Medicine.

Bursary recipients from 2021 also had the opportunity to use their bursaries in 2022, to participate in face-to-face training previously impacted by COVID-19.



2021 bursary recipient Dr Timothy Walsh completing his Advanced Paediatric Life Support course



See more stories from Monash Regional Training Hubs on our website



100+

final year rural medical students attended our online career seminar series



20

Emerging Leaders Program participants



16

bursaries provided to junior doctors in Gippsland and north west Victoria

ENGAGING WITH OUR REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

We are deeply engaged with the communities we work in and are committed to delivering improved health and educational outcomes in rural communities. We continue to work closely with individuals and organisations within our footprint to ensure that the education and research we deliver meets community needs.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Community Advisory Committees in Bendigo, Gippsland and Mildura were established in 2021, as part of the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network (MDMSN) program. The committees are composed of representatives from a range of health and community-based organisations, local government, education and community representatives. The committees met face-to-face for the first time in 2022, and meetings were attended by current End-to-End Rural Cohort students on placement. Students provided their feedback about their experiences of the program and intentions to live, study and work rurally in the future. Student needs were identified and links were made with Community Advisory Committee members to respond to these - from connections to sporting clubs to employment opportunities.

All three committees took part in a combined meeting in November, reviewing the year's activities and achievements. We look forward to continuing strong engagement with our Community Advisory Committees in 2023.



Monash medical students were hosted by Mildura Community Advisory Committee member Neth Hinton at the Hattah Conservation Bush Block, a protected habitat for vulnerable plant and animal species

MUSIC RETURNS TO THE VALLEY

The Monash Medical Orchestra's concert in Gippsland - Music for the Valley - successfully returned to the region for the first time in three years. More than 60 members of the Monash Medical Orchestra made the trip from Clayton to Churchill on Saturday 20 August for the much-anticipated concert. The evening's performance was filled with an air of celebration, and the event acknowledged several significant milestone anniversaries - the tenth anniversary of the Monash Medical Orchestra, the thirtieth anniversary of Monash Rural Health and the fiftieth anniversary of Federation University's Gippsland campus.

The Orchestra showcased highlights from Saint Saens Organ Symphony and Elgar's Enigma variations, as well as more contemporary sounds from Harry Potter and Pirates of the Caribbean. The Monash Medical Jazz Band also made their Gippsland debut, with a set conducted by Monash medical alumnus, Dr Kevin Shi.

A small group from the Orchestra also played two free performances at the High Street Community Hub in Moe, the day before the concert.



Councillor Kellie O'Callaghan (Latrobe City Council), Professor Shane Bullock (Monash Rural Health) and Professor Jenny Mosse (Federation University) with Monash Medical Orchestra co-chairs, Xenia Zubenko and Leon Yeung.



MARYBOROUGH WELCOMES MONASH MEDICAL STUDENT

Extended Rural Cohort student Anita Date received the Bendigo Bank Community Project Award, in recognition of her community engagement in her general practice rotation in Maryborough in 2022. Anita, who grew up in Melbourne, spent 18 weeks in Maryborough as part of her general practice placement. Despite being the only medical student living in the town, Anita embraced her adventurous spirit and found herself immersed in the local community, where she was warmly welcomed. During her time in the region, Anita presented on health careers and courses at a local secondary school and volunteered at the local community house and Red Cross youth group.

Anita Date receiving the Bendigo Bank Community Project Award with Year 4C academic lead, Associate Professor Dennis O'Connor, and at a VCE careers event in Maryborough.



“Living in Maryborough taught me that the heart of medicine is truly about the connection between individuals, meaning no matter where in Australia or the world you decide to call home, you will become a vital and much-needed part of the community.”

WILDFIRE ACTIVITIES IGNITE INTEREST IN RURAL HEALTH

Monash University’s student Rural and Indigenous Health Club - WILDFIRE - supported pre-clinical and clinical medical students, as well as nursing and allied health students to explore their passion for rural health in 2022.

WILDFIRE recommenced their high school visits this year and ran engaging presentations around rural health career pathways in Mildura and Maffra. The club also ran the twenty-eighth Matthew Campbell Memorial Evening, an annual event in memory of the late Matthew Campbell, a Monash medicine student committed to educating students on important issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. The 2022 event was delivered online and featured prominent, rurally-based keynote speakers on the impact of diabetes on Indigenous communities.



2022 WILDFIRE Photography Competition winner, taken by Vivek Satyajit

These events and initiatives help to build a supportive and connected community of health students with a shared drive to improve rural and Indigenous healthcare.



CREATING IMPACT THROUGH RESEARCH

Our research focuses on delivering better health outcomes for rural communities. In 2022, we continued our strong collaborative partnerships with organisations such as the Gippsland and Murray Primary Health Networks, the Gippsland Regional Palliative Care Consortium and General Practice Supervisors Australia, to ensure our research is closely aligned with the rural and regional health priorities of communities we serve.

FUNDING WIN SUPPORTS EQUITABLE TREATMENT FOR CORONARY HEART DISEASE

Associate Professor Alison Beauchamp received a \$597,000 grant from the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), to research ways to increase the accessibility of care for coronary heart disease for lower socioeconomic groups and those in underserved rural populations.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) remains a leading cause of death in Australia, and lower socioeconomic groups carry the greatest burden of disease. Not all Australians have equitable access to cardiac services, meaning that disadvantaged groups often miss out on receiving the best possible care.

The Equal Hearts Study will explore factors affecting the accessibility of cardiovascular care and co-design and test an intervention that addresses these factors. Partnering with Monash Health, Northern Health, Grampians Health and Colac Area Health, the research will also guide health services seeking to improve and monitor equity of access for their underserved populations. Associate Professor Beauchamp's research has the potential to address some of the barriers to equitable care for coronary heart disease, and ultimately save lives through positive interventions.

Associate Professor Alison Beauchamp



EVALUATION OF THE HEAD TO HEALTH PROGRAM

In 2020, the Commonwealth government established the Head-to-Health (H2H) service in Victoria to address the mental health needs of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Gippsland Primary Health Network (PHN) employed a unique 'hub and satellite' model to deliver the service, and used the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale to measure the level of distress of service users including changes over time.

Monash Rural Health conducted an evaluation over 18 months and reported that 2,604 individuals accessed the newly commissioned service including almost 15,000 service user contacts. Almost 45% of contacts were face to face and a similar number (39.6%) were by telehealth – most commonly by telephone. The large number of service users and contacts suggests that the H2H approach as a response to COVID-19 and lockdowns was an important contribution to mental health care during the peak COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns.

The evaluation showed that the H2H approach significantly reduced psychological distress, with Gippsland having the largest reduction in Kessler scores compared to other regions of Victoria. The evaluation report was submitted to the Gippsland Primary Health Network in 2022 and three refereed journal publications are in the later stages of submission for publication.



[View the research summary](#)

UNDERSTANDING METHAMPHETAMINE USE IN VICTORIA

Our VMAX study into the long-term patterns of methamphetamine use, run in partnership with the Burnet Institute, continued to deliver important insights.

Dr Michael Leach's research was published in *Health Care and the Community*. It is the first known research paper to investigate social support among people who use methamphetamine mainly via smoking, which is more common in Australia than injecting or other routes of administration. The research found that people using methamphetamine say they have good social support on average, although a quarter of the study participants did have low social support. Most reported that they could not count on anyone to provide them with emotional support. This was also supported by findings and two new publications from PhD student, Zoe Duncan, which showed that 60% of study participants who smoke methamphetamine were classified as experiencing moderate to severe anxiety and depression.

Despite the COVID-19-related challenges of 2022, our wonderful rural health field team (Rachael Goldsmith, Josh Peterson, Aimee Powell) continued data collection across many rural towns and we thank them for their commitment to this study.



IMPLEMENTING OPTIMAL CARE PATHWAYS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE WITH CANCER

Monash Rural Health and the Victorian Integrated Cancer Services are examining the learning and practice needs of health professionals who provide oncology services and care in implementing the Cancer Optimal Care Pathway (OCP) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer.

Following an initial survey with health professionals in Gippsland and Ballarat, these findings were published in the *International Journal of Integrated Care* in 2022. Our study found health professionals felt underprepared to implement the OCP with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer. Strategies around improving cultural safety, ensuring respect for culture, family, community and Country, and creating supports for patients outside the hospital system were key recommendations. The survey was expanded statewide this year, with findings to follow.



Photograph of artwork: Helen Treadgold (Dunghutti people, NSW). *The Cancer Journey* (2018).

NEW RESEARCH FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND RURAL HEALTH

Climate change makes rural communities even more vulnerable to poorer physical and mental health outcomes. Increases in extreme weather events (such as bushfires, floods, cyclones, heatwaves and drought), reductions in food and water security, decrease in mental health and wellbeing, increases in vector-borne diseases, worsening of chronic illness and increases in injury and mortality all further strain the rural health system, creating a widening gap in healthcare access and equity.

This year, we introduced a new theme to our body of research, focused on climate change and rural health. Researchers from Monash Rural Health started a collaboration with the Monash Sustainable Development Institute and joined the Climate Change Working Group within the University. These are important steps towards building our research in this area.



Hazelwood
HEALTH STUDY

HAZELWOOD HEALTH STUDY HIGHLIGHTS LONG-TERM IMPACT OF MINE FIRE

The Hazelwood Health Study, jointly led by Monash Rural Health and the Monash School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, has entered year nine of its initial ten-year research program. Our researchers remain actively involved in the research streams, including leading the Psychological Impacts stream and contributing to the Community Wellbeing, Adult Survey, Adult Respiratory, Hazelinks and Early Life-follow-up streams.

Major findings in 2022 included papers about the trajectory of distress, mental health service utilisation and impacts on young adults. The most frequently reported symptoms included fatigue, limb pain, trouble sleeping, back pain, headaches and shortness of breath. We found that higher levels of post-traumatic stress and general distress were each associated with the presence of most of the measured physical symptoms. Babies exposed to Hazelwood coal mine fire smoke were also found to be overrepresented in emergency department admissions for allergies, rashes, respiratory symptoms and infections.

The study team continues to work closely with key local partners including the Latrobe Health Assembly and the Latrobe Health Advocate, to ensure that findings inform local policy and practice, including work on improving dietary patterns and informing emergency response planning.



\$3.1m+
in research income



67
publications



13 PhD, 2 masters and 6 honours students supervised

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