

2024 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

As we reflect on the achievements of the past year, 2024 proved to be a testament to our School's dedication to excellence, innovation and community impact. Our staff were recognised for their outstanding contributions through the 2024 Dean's Awards for Excellence and the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards, demonstrating a commitment to academic distinction.

Our students continued to inspire, earning prestigious awards and scholarships that set new benchmarks in education and professional development. Their success highlighted the strength of our programs and the unwavering support of our academic community.

We remained steadfast in our commitment to the School's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework, embedding the framing pillars into our work to foster equity, cultural competence and meaningful engagement.

Supporting junior doctors remained a priority through the work of our Regional Training Hubs, which provided a comprehensive suite of professional development courses and resources designed to equip them better for their role in healthcare in regional and rural settings.

As we closed the year, we celebrated these achievements and looked ahead to another year of progress, collaboration and impact. Thank you to our School staff, university colleagues, health service partners and key stakeholders for continuing to work with us in 2024.



Professor Shane Bullock

Head of School
Monash Rural Health



Explore more of our achievements on our Year in Review 2024 website by visiting monash.edu/medicine/rural-health/year-in-review-2024 or by scanning this code

2024 AT A GLANCE



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 immersive and high-quality educational experiences within regional and rural settings, with the needs of rural communities front of mind.

In 2024, we 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.

TEAM UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATES RECOGNISED IN VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARD 2024

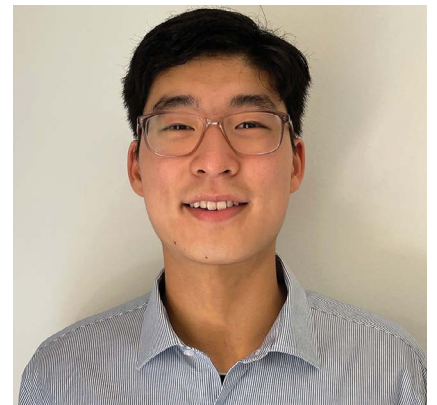
In 2024, the TEAM Undergraduate Certificates program earned prestigious recognition, receiving the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award in the 'Awards for Industry Education Programs' category. This marked a significant achievement for Monash Rural Health, acknowledging our dedication to addressing workforce demands in critical healthcare sectors.

Since its inception in 2021, the Faculty's three undergraduate certificates have profoundly benefited both students and the broader healthcare industry. Generating over \$15 million in income, these offerings have supported more than 3,000 students, many from rural communities, equipping them with essential knowledge and practical skills in mental health, aged care and disability support.

The development of the Undergraduate Certificate of Health Care Essentials and the Undergraduate Certificate of Aged Care Health Essentials was driven by an urgent need for qualified professionals in disability, respite and aged care settings. Recognising the vital role of healthcare workers, these courses were designed to provide accessible education for individuals from diverse backgrounds—including administrators, personal care workers and allied health professionals. The collaboration with Monash Rural Health further enriched the curriculum, ensuring graduates were well-prepared to meet industry challenges.



STUDENT RESEARCH DRIVING INNOVATION



Final-year medical student Eugene Wang made an outstanding contribution to rural healthcare research, earning well-deserved recognition for his Scholarly Intensive Placement (SIP). His study demonstrated that Central Gippsland Health Service provided superior care for paediatric type 1 diabetes patients compared to the national average, based on HbA1c levels—a key marker of blood glucose control.

Through this six-week SIP project, Eugene analysed patient demographics, glycaemic control and long-term outcomes. His research not only confirmed the clinic's excellence in diabetes management but also highlighted the importance of timely screening for comorbidities such as thyroid and coeliac disease. His findings were implemented to improve service delivery, reinforcing the program's commitment to continuous quality improvement and patient-centred care.

In recognition of his exceptional work, Eugene presented his findings at our DRIVERS 2024 conference, where he won the Best Poster Presentation award. His project served as a powerful example of how student-led initiatives can drive meaningful healthcare innovation.



2024 DEAN'S AWARD CELEBRATES MONASH'S COMMITMENT TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Monash Rural Health Churchill's Community-Based Placement (CBP) Program was recognised in the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' 2024 Dean's Award for Excellence in Education: Community Education Programs.

Through this transformative program, first-year graduate entry medical students dedicate nearly 4000 placement hours annually, working alongside 20 Gippsland organisations to actively support and give back to the local community. More than just a placement, the CBP Program provides students with hands-on experience while fostering deep connections between future doctors and the communities they will one day serve.

Led by our passionate Monash Rural Health Churchill team, this scalable, low-cost program is reshaping the way medical students engage with real-world healthcare challenges.

This recognition highlighted the CBP Program's success in bridging medical education with meaningful community engagement—a true testament to Monash's efforts in shaping the future of healthcare in rural Australia.



HONOURING MEDICAL STUDENTS WHO GIVE BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

This year, the Bendigo Bank Community Project Award recognised the outstanding community contributions of two fourth-year medical students based in rural hubs across the Loddon Mallee region. The award highlighted the importance of students engaging with their placement communities beyond clinical and teaching commitments. Recipients received a cash sponsorship, a plaque and had their names added to the honour board at Monash Rural Health Bendigo.

This year's award was presented to Charlie Roach and Sophie Fontaine, who demonstrated remarkable dedication to community integration during their rural placements. Charlie, particularly through volunteering with St John Ambulance in Mildura, found that active participation helped him become a valuable contributor to the community. He described this immersion as a fulfilling experience that broadened his perspectives on rural life and strengthened his understanding of providing care in small communities—insights that would be invaluable in his future clinical practice.



Sophie also made an exceptional impact through her involvement in community-led initiatives, contributing to local health programs and outreach services.

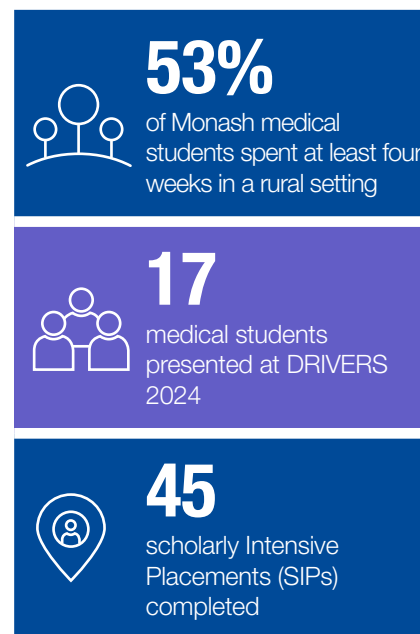
The initiative aimed to inspire students to connect meaningfully with rural

communities, ensuring a lasting positive impact on both students and the communities that supported their education.



“Volunteering in both local communities – especially through St John in Mildura – further immersed me into the community. The more I participated, the more I became an active contributor. This provided a great sense of fulfilment, and broadened my perspectives on life in a rural town.”

Charlie Roach (pictured on the right-hand side of image)



Explore more of our education stories on our website

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 2024, 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.

SHOWCASING INNOVATION IN RURAL HEALTH AT DRIVERS 2024 CONFERENCE

Hosted by Monash Rural Health's North West Victoria Regional Training Hub, the Doctors for Regional Innovation, Vision, Excellence, Research and Scholarship (DRIVERS) conference was established in 2021 to highlight opportunities and challenges unique to rural healthcare. The annual conference supported the next generation of rural doctors, showcasing excellence in regional medicine and fostering important discussions to drive innovation and improve patient care. In 2024, the DRIVERS conference introduced interactive workshops for the first time, enhancing engagement and learning.

Topics ranged from inclusive healthcare for transgender patients and the use of AI in medicine to strategies for recruiting and retaining rural doctors. Junior doctors received essential guidance on wellbeing and career pathways in rural health from keynote speaker, head and neck surgeon Dr Bridget Clancy. Associate Professor Forbes McGain delivered insights into environmentally sustainable healthcare in hospital settings.

The conference saw strong participation, with over 80 attendees coming together to share insights and collaborate.

DRIVERS 2025 will be hosted by our Gippsland Regional Training Hub in Traralgon from 10–11 October 2025.



Visit our [DRIVERS website](#)



STRENGTHENING THE MEDICAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE IN RURAL VICTORIA

The Monash Rural Health Clinical Teaching and Education Pathway (CTEP) continues to make a meaningful impact in regional medical education. Now in its fourth year, this award-winning program became an essential professional development initiative, equipping rural doctors with the tools necessary to effectively mentor the next generation of healthcare professionals.

CTEP, designed by Monash Rural Health's Dr Lisa Hall, is a three-stage program tailored to build the teaching and supervision capabilities of

doctors working in regional healthcare settings. A particular focus is placed on upskilling early-career doctors, ensuring they have the skills to guide medical students and junior colleagues. Supported by the Gippsland and North West Regional Training Hubs, the program offered structured learning, practical application and collaborative engagement with experienced educators.

This year, over 50 doctors from Bendigo, Mildura and Gippsland participated in the introductory workshop, which provided foundational

insights into clinical teaching and learning. From this cohort, 28 progressed to the second stage, which focused on supervision—a crucial element in developing confident and competent medical practitioners. This stage included a full-day workshop co-delivered by the Monash Centre for Scholarship in Health Education, ensuring participants gained both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies.



RURAL DOCTORS STRENGTHEN THEIR TRAINING THROUGH BURSARIES

The Rural Resume Boost Bursary Program, delivered by Monash Regional Training Hubs, once again played a pivotal role in strengthening professional development for junior doctors in Gippsland and North West Victoria. In 2024, 32 doctors received bursary funding, providing essential support for career advancement and specialty training.

Sponsored by the Gippsland and North West Victoria Regional Training Hubs, the program is designed to help junior doctors access training, resources and professional development opportunities that enhance their career prospects.

The bursaries enabled recipients to engage in a range of career-enhancing activities, including attending specialty conferences, completing advanced skills training, acquiring necessary equipment and publishing research. A competitive selection process ensured funding was awarded based on merit, reinforcing the program's commitment to fostering excellence in regional healthcare.



LOCAL DOCTORS, BIG CONVERSATIONS: NEW SEASON OF THE DOCTOR WHAT? DOCTOR WHERE? PODCAST

Our Doctor What? Doctor Where? podcast continued to shine a spotlight on rural medical careers in 2024, with the release of seven engaging episodes as part of season two. These conversations, which generated over 3,000 plays, featured candid insights from junior doctors navigating their early careers and highlighted the unique rewards of rural healthcare.

alike—ranging from the intern match process and life as a rural GP, to the challenges of balancing parenthood with a medical career and much more.



Explore our Doctor What? Doctor Where? Podcast episodes

Building on this momentum, the Gippsland Regional Training Hub also recorded ten new episodes as part of season three. This next chapter delves deeper into topics that matter to early-career doctors and medical students

FROM NYAH TO NATIONAL HONOURS

Monash medical alumna and rural surgery registrar Dr Jessica (Jess) Paynter was awarded the Rural Doctors Association of Australia's Rural Doctor in Training of the Year for 2024. Raised in Nyah, in north-west Victoria, Dr Paynter completed her medical degree through Monash's Extended Rural Cohort, undertaking placements across Mildura, Swan Hill, Bendigo, Broome and the Bidiyadanga Aboriginal Community.

Her early commitment to rural healthcare was recognised when she was named the 2018 Victorian Rural Health Awards' Medical Student of the Year. Since graduating, she interned at Bendigo Health and worked as an unaccredited surgical registrar in both Bendigo and Echuca, where she credited the strong team camaraderie and support as instrumental in shaping her career path.

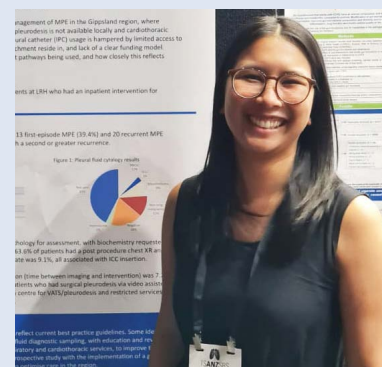


Dr Paynter accepted her award at the Rural Medicine Australia Conference Dinner in Darwin and acknowledged the role of mentors and training programs in supporting her career. She planned to continue her rural surgical training in South Australia and the Northern Territory before returning to the Murray-Mallee region to practise as a rural surgeon.



"I am so grateful to the support of the Gippsland Regional Training Hub in helping me thrive in my training. I will endeavour to bring the knowledge and skills I have acquired to improve the respiratory health of patients in the Gippsland region."

Dr Grace Yap from Latrobe Regional Health.



51 doctors completed Stage 1 of our Clinical Teaching and Education Pathway

46 Gippsland participants in the DrJuMP Mentoring Program

31 CV boost bursaries were provided for doctors

7 Doctor What? Doctor Where? podcast episodes released



Explore more stories from the Monash Regional Training Hubs

ENGAGING WITH OUR REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

We recognise that working collaboratively and responding to the needs of our communities is essential to achieving shared impact and success. This year, we deepened our commitment to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework through a range of program initiatives that have been both impactful and insightful for students and staff alike.

We also reinforced partnerships across our footprint, expanding opportunities for students to progress and thrive in rural settings.

ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FRAMEWORK



Since the launch of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework in 2023, we have strengthened our commitment to cultural safety by embedding Indigenous health education across our programs. A key initiative was the First Nations health education program in Bendigo, developed in collaboration with local Indigenous education groups. This program equipped students with a deeper understanding of Dja Dja Wurrung culture, ensuring they developed the skills to provide culturally safe care. Through cultural learning sessions with Djaara and training in culturally responsive clinical skills, students gained invaluable perspectives that enhanced their approach to healthcare.

Beyond structured learning, immersive experiences such as cultural camps, being out on Country and Truth Telling sessions in Mildura and Bendigo fostered meaningful engagement between students and Aboriginal

communities. By hearing directly from Elders and engaging with Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers, students deepened their understanding of Indigenous health challenges and histories. These interactions also sparked increased interest in research focused on Indigenous rural health, highlighting the importance of informed, culturally sensitive approaches to healthcare in regional communities.

Staff engagement was also pivotal in advancing allyship, with 85% of Monash Rural Health staff enrolling

in the Allies in Indigenous Health professional development unit. This strong participation underscored a collective commitment to lifelong learning and cultural awareness.



Download a copy of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework 2021–2030.

“The most empowering thing about Monash Rural Health and the staff is that everyone is prepared to listen and learn and be a part of the implementation of the Framework. This is flowing from leadership to all staff, everyone wants to make this happen and contribute to Aboriginal equity in our rural communities.”

David Byrnes, Aboriginal Communities Engagement Lead

EMPOWERING FUTURE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS THROUGH WORK EXPERIENCE

Monash Rural Health Bendigo's work experience program has provided over 800 hours of work experience for secondary school students across Bendigo. The program's aim is to inspire the next generation of health professionals to experience a day in the life of a Monash medical student.



“For students who grow up in rural and regional areas like Bendigo, they sometimes struggle to see a pathway forward for them into studying medicine. Undertaking work experience with us, I see how their confidence grows as they can see that studying medicine could be a real possibility for them.”

Kamil Chetty, Administrative Officer (Clinical and Community Engagement)

DANIEL PATCHETT AWARDED EAST GIPPSLAND MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIP

In 2024, fourth-year Monash Medicine student Daniel Patchett was awarded the East Gippsland Medical Scholarship, funded by Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV), in recognition of his strong commitment to supporting the Gippsland community. The Gippsland Regional Training Hub hosted a lunch where RWAV and Monash Rural Health's Head of School, Professor Shane Bullock, formally presented Daniel with his certificate.



RECORD-BREAKING AUDIENCE FOR MONASH MEDICAL ORCHESTRA'S ANNUAL GIPPSLAND CONCERT



This year, the Monash Medical Orchestra returned to Gippsland for its eighth annual Music for the Valley concert at Federation University, drawing a record audience of over 200 attendees. Sixty performers from the Monash Medical Orchestra, Monash Medical Jazz Band and the Kurnai College Players delivered over two hours of captivating music, marking the event's largest turnout to date.



Explore more stories on our website

CREATING IMPACT THROUGH RESEARCH

Leading rural health research is a core strategy outlined in the Monash Rural Health Strategic Plan 2023–2027, and we remain committed to delivering high-quality research that addresses critical issues affecting rural communities. In 2024, we advanced research in key areas including cardiovascular disease and mental health, while continuing to drive progress in the Hazelwood Health Study.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN RURAL AND METROPOLITAN HEALTH LITERACY IN CARDIOVASCULAR CARE

Monash medical student Kaveesha Jayasuriya's honours research uncovered a significant health literacy gap between rural and metropolitan cardiovascular patients. His study found that metropolitan patients who had experienced a heart attack were more actively engaged with their healthcare providers than their rural counterparts, with lower health literacy linked to poorer health outcomes. Interestingly, a higher proportion of rural participants reported improvements in their ability to engage with healthcare providers and navigate the system over time.

Supported by health literacy experts Dr Denise Azar and Associate Professor Alison Beauchamp, Kaveesha's research was presented at the National Rural Health Conference in Perth in September 2024, where it contributed to discussions on improving rural health equity.



MONASH RURAL HEALTH RESEARCH EXPOSES MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM INEFFICIENCIES

This research, led by Dr Anton Isaacs of Monash Rural Health, exposed significant shortcomings in Australia's mental health system, highlighting its fragmented structure and chronic under-resourcing. Interviews with carers and service users revealed overwhelmingly negative experiences, with many citing structural inefficiencies, long wait times and inadequate support post-treatment. Participants emphasised the need for more holistic and person-centred care, advocating for a shift beyond traditional medical approaches to incorporate social and wellbeing factors. The findings underscored the urgency of systemic reform to better address the needs of mental health service users and their carers.



HAZELWOOD HEALTH STUDY FINDINGS



The fire in the Morwell open-cut mine adjacent to the Hazelwood power station blanketed Morwell and the surrounding area in smoke and ash for six weeks in February and March 2014. In response to community concerns about the long-term health effects, the Victorian Department of Health commissioned the Hazelwood Health Study.

The Study's 10-year research program was completed in October 2024, with the Department of Health providing an additional 8 months of funding to 30 June 2025, focused on engagement with the local community, dissemination of findings and other closure-related activities.

The study was led by researchers from Monash University in collaboration with Federation University and the University of Tasmania. Associate Professor Matthew Carroll from Monash Rural Health served as the Gippsland-based lead investigator.

The Hazelwood Health Study aimed to identify potential health outcomes for people who may have been impacted by the mine fire smoke. These included heart and lung disease, cancer and mental health issues. It also examined the effects on vulnerable groups such as infants and children, young people and older adults.

In 2024, the study's key findings covered several areas, including longer-term impacts of the mine fire on community wellbeing, lung function in adults and children, emergency department visits and hospital admissions, adult psychological health, cancer incidence and how diet quality moderated the relationship between smoke exposure on chronic cough and phlegm.



Congratulations to Dr Zoe Duncan who was awarded her PhD in 2024. Zoe's PhD resulted in high impact publications in *Addiction*, *Addictive Behaviours*, the *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction* and the *Australia & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.

Dr Zoe Duncan at her graduation ceremony



Visit the Hazelwood Health Study website to learn more



View the Monash Rural Health Research Strategy 2024–2027



\$983,063

new multi-year research grants & contracts awarded



130+

publications as part of the Hazelwood Health Study



Explore more research stories on our website

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