



**MONASH**  
University

MONASH  
RURAL  
HEALTH

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2023–2027



MONASH UNIVERSITY acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which our teaching sites are located.  
We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

Photograph: Warisa Somsuphangsri

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**PROFESSOR SHANE BULLOCK**  
Head of School  
Monash Rural Health

## MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Around 30% of the Australian population live in regional, rural and remote communities. Rural Australia has long been the economic powerhouse of the nation. We are popular centres for tourism and resource rich - supplying energy, agricultural products and construction materials that power, feed and build our country.

However, rural access to healthcare is poorer than for our metropolitan neighbours. The health outcomes for rural communities are poor compared to metro communities on just about every measure. Life expectancy is shorter. Avoidable death rates are higher than for urban dwellers. Rural people tend to wait longer before they see a doctor. This is due to a number of factors such as geography, distance to travel and access to health care. They are usually sicker when they eventually access their health care.

Monash Rural Health makes a significant contribution to the recruitment and retention of the Victorian health workforce. However, there is an acute maldistribution and shortage of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals across Australian rural communities. Postgraduate medical training, besides that of general practitioners and rural generalists, is concentrated in the cities. There has been no coordinated strategy across the medical Colleges to address demand. For example there is an oversupply of emergency and cardiac specialists, but an undersupply of rural GPs and psychiatrists. There is also a significant gap in the income of GPs versus non-GP specialists. The work of our Regional Training Hubs in partnership with the medical Colleges, local health services and other regional stakeholders to increase postgraduate training opportunities in rural settings is very important. We aim to flip the proportion of training spent in rural and metro areas, so trainees spend more time rurally. Successful pilots are already in place in paediatrics and psychiatry in Victoria.

Models of care need to be fit-for-purpose for rural health care delivery. Metropolitan care models don't necessarily work in rural settings. The use of telehealth across rural communities has dramatically increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over recent years, there's been a push for a greater focus on integrated primary healthcare in rural areas. Primary healthcare is essential in preventing and managing chronic illness so that rural people do not enter health care at a time when they are severely ill. Our work in rural nursing and allied health placements and service-led learning is vital to achieving this.

We want to play a critical role in addressing challenging contemporary issues such as climate change, geopolitical insecurity and thriving communities in order to deliver safe and sustainable rural healthcare.

Given the immediate health challenges described above, Monash Rural Health states its priorities and provides a future vision in rural health education and research over the next four years in this new strategic plan. This plan provides the catalyst for innovative and collaborative engagement within the School, Faculty, University, our communities and our industry partners to address current, and future, problems. We use the term 'rural' throughout this plan, to encompass regional, rural and remote areas or settings.

On behalf of Monash Rural Health, I thank all those who have contributed to this shared vision for our School to be a leader in rural health education and research. We rely on the goodwill, dedication and commitment of our staff, students and our stakeholders. Without this support we could not achieve our goals. We look forward to continued strong engagement with you as we address these challenges over the next four years and beyond.

It is with pleasure that I present the Monash Rural Health Strategic Plan 2023–2027.

## MONASH RURAL HEALTH

Monash University's School of Rural Health, or Monash Rural Health, is committed to improving the health outcomes of regional and rural communities. The School is an academic unit within the University's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences.

Monash Rural Health's footprint extends over 1,000 kilometres, covering the north-west of Victoria and Gippsland and has major academic administrative sites at Mildura, Bendigo, Warragul, Traralgon, Churchill, Leongatha, Sale and Bairnsdale.

We seek to improve the health outcomes of regional and rural communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, through the recruitment and retention of the rural health workforce, initiation and participation in meaningful health-related research, and engagement with our communities to promote health and health career opportunities. We work collaboratively with our regional health services (hospital and community-based), community organisations, primary health networks, health consumer advocacy groups, rural workforce agencies, education and training providers, government and local Indigenous communities to achieve these outcomes.

Our School is responsible for delivering the Monash medical course within our rural footprint and provides high quality extended regional placements that increase the likelihood of graduates choosing rural clinical practice.

The Monash medical course is one of the most complex in Australia, with entry as both a school leaver and as a Bachelor degree graduate, delivered in metropolitan Melbourne, in rural Victoria and internationally in Malaysia.

Monash medical students can elect to enroll as a member of our rural cohorts, committing to completing most of their course rurally. We work closely with the Faculty to support the curriculum, assessment, student welfare and evaluation of the medical course. The University and Faculty determine admissions policy, but consults closely with our School to inform student selection.

Our Gippsland and North West Victoria Regional Training Hubs work with regional stakeholders to increase the opportunities for rurally-based postgraduate training, as well as providing networking and professional development for young rural doctors.

We also work with other Schools in our Faculty to promote rural placement of nursing, pharmacy and allied health students. Our School provides accommodation, opportunities for interprofessional learning and support for nursing and allied health students completing rural placement within our footprint. We provide this support to nursing and allied health students from any Australian university.

## OUR SERVICES

At Monash Rural Health we provide the education that helps create the next generations of health practitioners in rural communities, building and developing the rural health workforce. We enthusiastically promote opportunities for people to live and work in rural health. We engage in research that benefits or advocates for the health of rural communities. We offer leadership in the discussion of rural health care priorities.

But through these two endeavours - education and research - we do so much more.

Like all our colleagues and students across the many campuses and communities of Monash University, we strive to understand, engage with, and address the major contemporary global challenges - climate change, geopolitical security, and thriving communities.

Monash Rural Health receives significant funding from the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program and Murray Darling Medical Schools Network (MDMSN) Program. Each of these programs has specific deliverables and these articulate with the Monash Rural Health Strategic Plan.



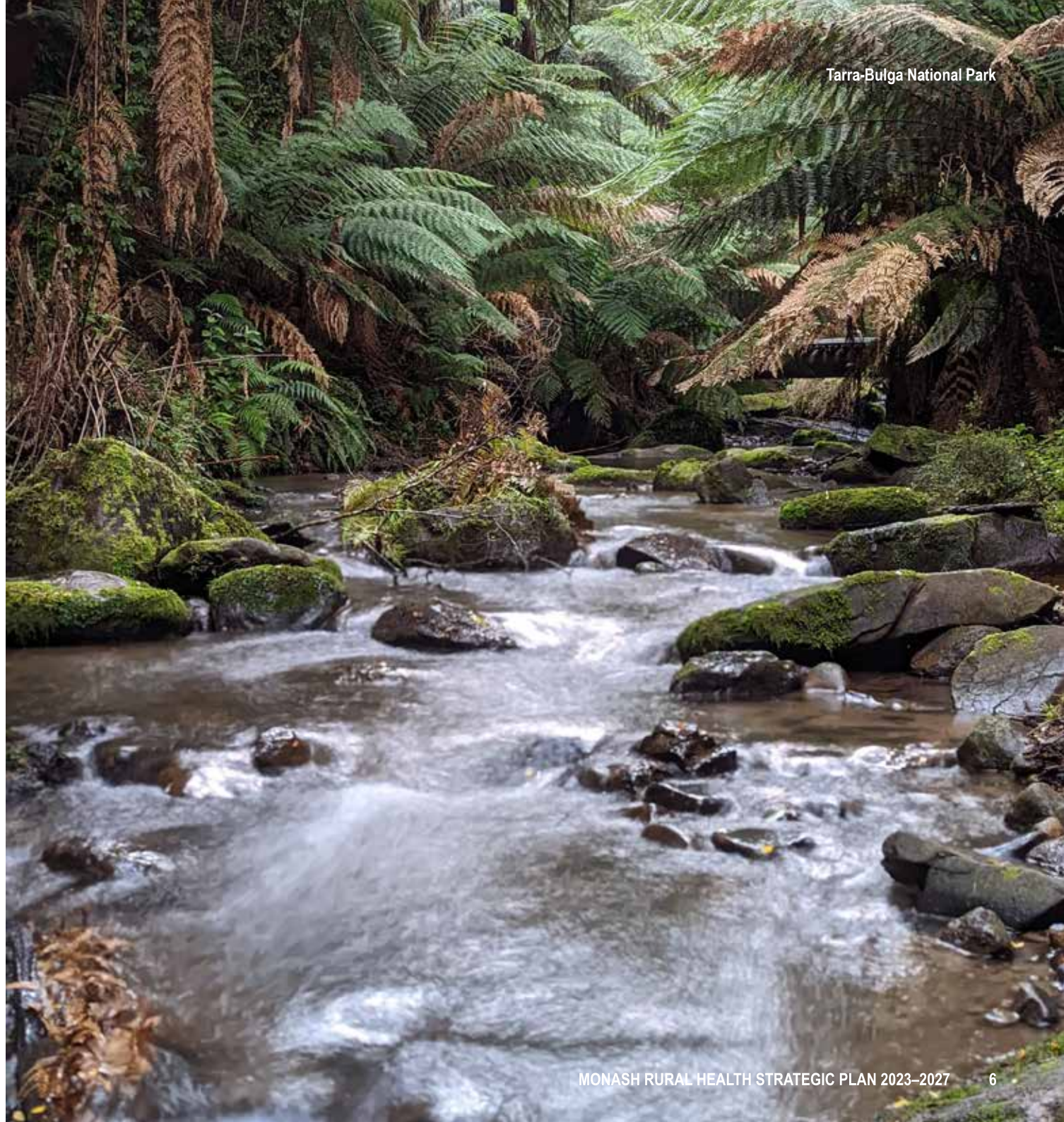
## CLIMATE CHANGE

As the World Health Organization has made clear, climate change is already impacting our lives and health. Prolonged drought and frequent extreme weather events are just the most immediate signs of a profoundly shifting environment.

While a crisis response is needed to address these alarming occurrences, a longer-term approach that both prevents crises, and prepares for them is needed. The effects of floods, bushfires, droughts and other extreme weather events associated with climate change are experienced in rural communities more keenly than most.

We cannot live healthy lives without the building blocks of human life - clean air, safe drinking water, reliable food supply and safe shelter. Areas without strong health infrastructure will be affected most by climate change, including rural and remote communities in Australia.

Our commitment at Monash Rural Health is to strengthen the human resources available to rural communities through teaching and socio-economic development, and to create new ways of understanding the challenges we will inevitably face. We need to respond early and prevent the worst impacts of the coming wave, harnessing community strengths and overcoming vulnerabilities. Targeted research that prepares our communities for this will be vital.



## GEOPOLITICAL SECURITY

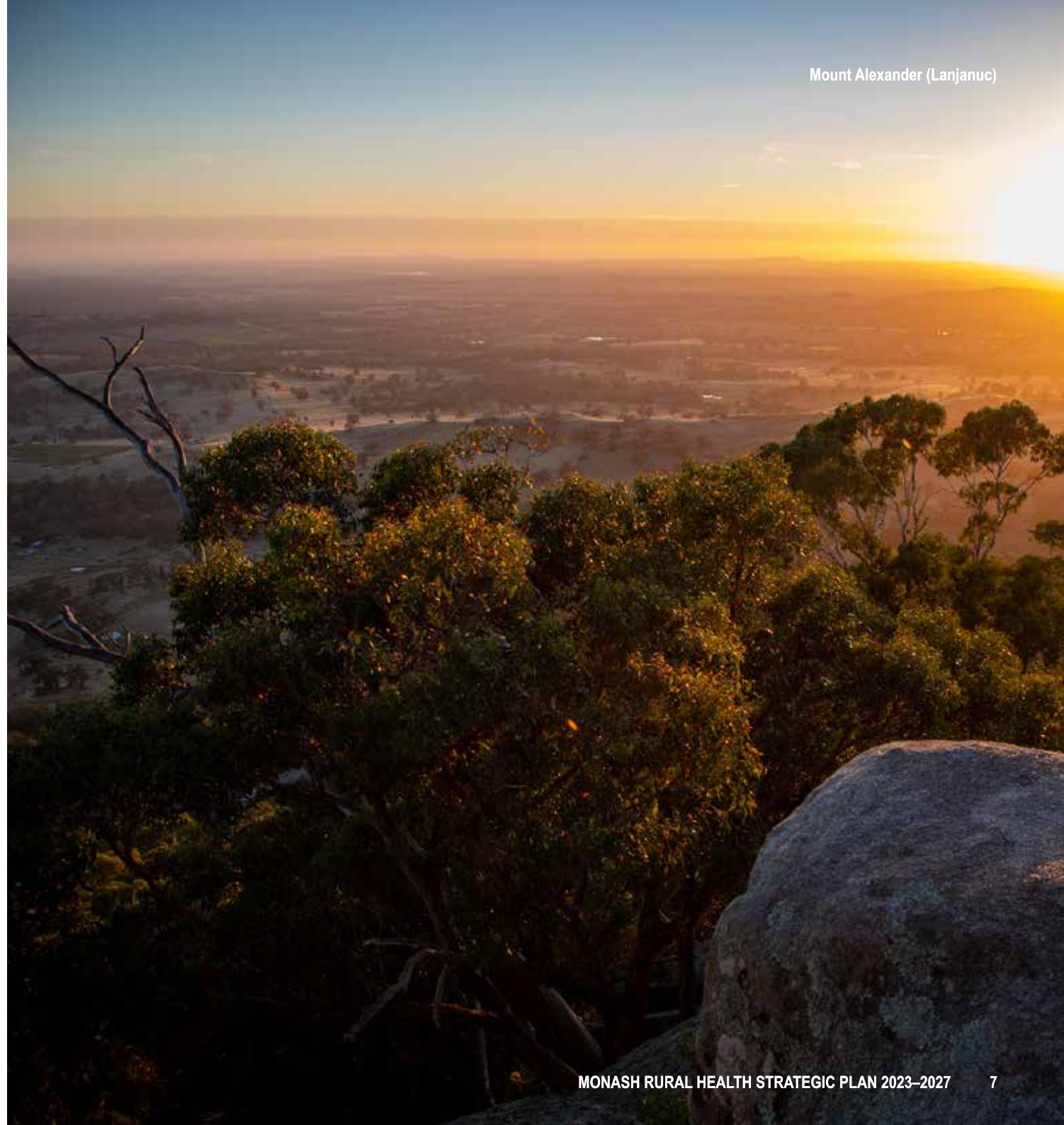
Inequality leads to insecurity and the erosion of trust in institutions. When the benefits of learning concentrate in fewer people, there is a reduction in knowledge. Through our example we can raise the expectations and achievements of rural communities, so that effective responses to rural concerns can be generated locally and shared globally.

The kind of inequality that opens vulnerabilities within Australian rural communities also hurts our neighbours and friends across the globe. As the growing threat of climate change, and our recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic shows, we cannot simply look within our own borders and communities for the causes and solutions to our challenges. Health issues that observe no borders must be treated and prevented across communities and regions.

Our Australian rural communities can be part of the solution. Rural communities have embraced displaced people from other nations and welcomed them as their own, creating increasingly diverse populations. By educating health and community professionals around the world, and actively developing global partnerships to share knowledge and expertise, Monash Rural Health will provide leadership and focus for rural rural communities worldwide. Through such education and partnerships we can cultivate shared worldviews, histories and experiences in our region, unimagined by our predecessors.

Our future demands that we act as equal partners in sharing knowledge to address our shared regional needs.

Mount Alexander (Lanjanuc)



## THRIVING COMMUNITIES

We know that thriving communities are healthy communities. This means that clinical and technological capabilities in our communities need to be addressed alongside systemic social issues such as inequality, disadvantage, tolerance, discrimination, socioeconomic status and violence in the home. With skilled clinicians informed by social awareness, we will make sure that our communities are ready for the difficulties that will confront them.

As Australia's rural communities become increasingly diverse, with domestic and international migration shaping our demographic profiles, health service delivery methods must be responsive to the needs of these populations. We must listen and respond to the lived and living experience of patients and health consumer advocates. The lived experience of patients needs to inform contemporary healthcare delivery

Many Australian rural communities are not thriving. Within rural communities, access to mental health services, primary health care, drug and alcohol services, as well as coordinated and integrated chronic disease management can greatly affect their capacity to thrive. Such access may be poorer in these communities compared to urban areas. Moreover, many rural communities have a relatively older population than metropolitan areas, putting further pressure on healthcare delivery within these regions. Monash Rural Health is in a position to provide leadership and advocacy nationally and within the University - a rural voice - in developing solutions to assist these rural communities to thrive.

In Australia, home to the planet's oldest living cultures, the obstacles facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in rural areas are among the most challenging in the world. Many of these obstacles are the result of colonisation and white privilege. We will create opportunities for the knowledge, expertise and skills of Aboriginal individuals and communities to lead. The Monash Rural Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework 2021-2030 identifies our strategic approach to strengthen our relationship with, and support for the diverse Aboriginal communities across our footprint. Our strategic plan must articulate closely with this framework.



## OUR VISION

Through high quality education and research programs, we enable increased access to health professionals and models of care that create safe, healthy and inclusive rural communities.

## OUR PURPOSE

To partner with our rural communities to identify and address health challenges and facilitate opportunities for creating environments that foster health and wellbeing.



## OUR 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



# OUR STRATEGY

## 1.0 Educating the rural health workforce for the future

### Strategies

- 1.1 Review placement mapping, modeling and funding inclusive of allocation processes
- 1.2 Review and develop entry pathways to medicine for underrepresented communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other groups experiencing disadvantage
- 1.3 Maintain educational excellence and use evidence-based approaches
- 1.4 Provide opportunities for students to gain broad perspectives on rural healthcare, such as the role of the health consumer and community in healthcare decision-making and fit-for-purpose rural models of care.
- 1.5 Develop and implement processes to increase rural student entry and postgraduate training
- 1.6 Review and develop engagement, advocacy and influence with the professional Colleges and rural health student networks to enable change (as required) to training requirements in rural locations
- 1.7 Develop and implement programs to better support the mental health and wellbeing of our students and staff
- 1.8 Review accommodation support role and develop alternative opportunities that provide sustainable accommodation solutions for rural student placements
- 1.9 Contribute to the development of curricula to incorporate: rural health, climate change, thriving communities and geopolitical security
- 1.10 Explore opportunities to increase rural workforce capacity through targeted short courses, microcredentialing and coursework degrees
- 1.11 Develop medicine, nursing and allied health clinical placement opportunities in expanded settings

### Measures of success

- A pathway for Gippsland students to enter medicine via the Federation University Bachelor of Biomedical Science (Gippsland Partnership Program) is sustainable.
- End-to-End Rural Cohort students choose to practice rurally
- Increased number of graduates who progress into rural internships
- Students report that the medicine education program prepares them for practice and are highly satisfied with their course experience
- Increased nursing and allied health clinical placements into expanded and diverse settings
- Increased number of rural students interested in healthcare selecting Monash University
- Increased number of rural students who select rural placements
- Increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who enrol and graduate from the medicine course
- Increased number of students from underrepresented groups who enrol and graduate from the medicine course
- Greater opportunities for postgraduate medical training in rural locations
- Increase in recruitment and retention of rural health workforce.

# OUR STRATEGY

## 2.0 Leading rural health research

### Strategies

- 2.1** Develop and implement a research plan for the 2023-2027 period, aligned to the Monash University, RHMT and MDMSN priority areas which embed research capacity building and include a focus on:
- Rural and remote health workforce and training
  - Health service delivery models in regional, rural and remote areas
  - The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
  - The health of regional, rural and remote populations, particularly communities within the University's catchment area
- 2.2** Expand partnerships with: other schools within Monash; community organisations and peak bodies such as primary health networks; health services; Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations; Rural Workforce Agency Victoria and Industry to form research teams
- 2.3** Grow programs to support and attract domestic and international graduate research students
- 2.4** Provide opportunities for Monash Rural Health research staff and students who wish to actively engage and participate in research

### Measures of success

- Increased rural health research grants and tenders obtained within the School
- Increased quality of research publications
- Increased graduate student enrolments and research opportunities for regional students
- Research that has impact in non-metropolitan areas
- Rural health services and other partners access research opportunities across Monash University.

## OUR VALUES

The following values underpin our behaviours and decisions and shape our culture, drawn from Monash University's Strategic Plan: *Impact 2030*.

### Discovering

We nurture curiosity and innovation in the pursuit of new knowledge to build our understanding of natural and social environments and communities.

### Learning

We are open to experiment and test our understanding with evidence: we adapt and learn from experience, new circumstances and others, recognising that we are always still learning.

### Purposeful

We aspire to use our knowledge and learning to improve our communities; we strive to transform our understanding and engagement to make an impact by contributing to solutions for significant challenges and persistent problems.

### Collaborative

We seek to work with others to achieve our goals, and commit to engaging cooperatively, collegially and responsively in developing shared aims and benefits.

### Honest

We commit to acting in good faith with integrity and transparency in our relations within and outside the University community.

### Fair

We pledge to treat all people equitably and with respect, making objective and unbiased decisions, and preventing behaviours such as discrimination, vilification, harassment and violence that inhibit the full engagement of people in our community.

## OUR STRATEGIC ENABLERS

### Workforce

Our staff are the key to achieving our vision. An engaged workforce drives better student outcomes, increases enjoyment and meaning in our work. It helps to attract the best people—and keep them. We will strengthen our existing environment and planning structure to attract, recruit and retain the highest calibre talent. We will create a culture that fosters open, honest communication throughout the School. We will invest in the support and development of our team members at all levels to enable them to develop capability, grow professionally and deliver best practice education and research.

### Analytics

We will establish the foundations required to become an insight-driven School—one in which all team members have a clear understanding of performance drivers, as well as opportunities to improve. This will include improving the quality, connectivity and utility of our data assets. We will build on our capabilities in Business Intelligence to harness information and share learnings.

### Technology

We will support education and research activities with a reliable, accessible, intuitive and integrated digital environment. We will integrate technology and systems to improve workflow within and beyond Monash Rural Health, to better capture data and improve the way education is delivered and research is undertaken. We will introduce new technologies at a sustainable pace, and work with our staff to support effective implementation and use.

### Governance & decision making

We will review our governance processes to ensure accountability at all levels within Monash Rural Health for delivering this plan. This involves designing a process to evaluate the success of the plan and to embed it across the school. We will also continue to work closely with University partners and other key stakeholders to ensure our respective responsibilities are clearly defined and we work collaboratively.

### Partnerships

We are committed to working closely with our partners to deliver the best outcomes for rural communities, for our students and our staff. Successful delivery of our plan requires effective partnerships with stakeholders, the community, other education institutions, government and the private sector. We will communicate transparently and openly with all partners on our strategic priorities, where we need help, and where we can help.

### Sustainability

We are committed to creating a strategically, environmentally, structurally and financially sound school. We will advocate for investment in infrastructure and use our spaces in innovative ways to meet contemporary and future requirements. Our actions will be underpinned by financial discipline—which may, at times, mean making hard decisions. We will focus on minimising waste, maximising efficiency, and achieving value for investment.

## REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan will be monitored by the Monash Rural Health executive team on a regular basis and reviewed on an annual basis to track progress. This will ensure the plan remains current and adapts to any changes in our internal and external operating environment.

## OUR LOCATIONS

### **Bairnsdale**

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## MONASH RURAL HEALTH

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