University Department of Rural Health

Excellence and equity in Rural Health through education, research and engagement

Research

The University Department of Rural Health undertakes a range of rural health research. Our research focuses on three key areas: (1) Rural health workforce, (2) Rural chronic illness, and (3) Culturally inclusive rural health care. We also have our Rural Health Academic Network who are researchers based in small health services. All our research projects are conducted in partnership with health services and local communities and we appreciate their collaboration.

Nursing and Allied Health Workforce

Nursing and Allied Health Students:
The UDRH support 1400 nursing and allied health students to undertake a clinical placement in a rural area. Evaluation of these placement experiences enables improvement and identification of quality placements. Detailed evaluation of our service learning placements has been undertaken. A longitudinal follow-up of these students is underway.

Student perspectives: As a placement, a social work student interviewed 18 nursing and allied health students about barriers and enablers of students going rural for their clinical placements. Financial support, good supervision, a welcoming health service and flexibility from the host university were identified as key enablers.

Retention project: A project has been developed to provide whole-of-person support to new allied health professionals at two rural health services. Evaluating Dr Cosgrave’s theory of retention, this action research project is supporting new staff through their initial years of employment.

Student intentions and practice after they have completed Cultural Safety training: A research project is following up students who completed our cultural training to assess the impact years after completing the training.

Key Publications


**Research at the Department of Rural Health**

**Rural Health Workforce**
- Trialling ways to improve training of the future rural health workforce
- Understanding recruitment and retention

**Rural Chronic Ill-health**
- Identifying chronic illness and service needs across our regions' population
- Trialling new clinical/behavioural approaches to improve care for rural people with a chronic illness

**Culturally Inclusive Rural Health Care**
- Giving a voice to rural residents in our regions who struggle to access appropriate care
- Working with health services to improve client/patient access, engagement and inclusion

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**Crossroads II**: A research study is repeating a population health survey and clinical assessment of a random sample of residents from Shepparton, Mooroopna, Cobram, Benalla and Seymour. This NHMRC partnership project with 10 local partners will assess access to services, utilisation of services, rates of key conditions and rates of undiagnosed disease.

**Other projects include:**
- Systematic review of patterns of referral in chronic disease in Australia, NZ, Canada and UK
- NHW and PHN integrated care for COPD, diabetes and heart failure, and the patient journey
- Perception of overweight and obesity
- Preferred language regarding overweight and obesity

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**Key Publications**

Glenister, Kristen M., Christina Malatzky and Julian R. Wright (2017) Barriers to effective conversations regarding overweight and obesity in regional Victoria. Australian Family Physician 46(10): 769-773.


Opie, Cynthia, Helen Haines, Kaye Ervin, Kristen Glenister and David Pierce (2017). Why Australia needs to define obesity as a chronic condition. BMC Public Health, 17 doi:10.1186/s12889-017-4434-1


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The UDRH acknowledge the Australian Government Department of Health for funding through the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training programme.
Culturally Inclusive Rural Health Care

This research stream is about increasing access to services and improving the experience of health care for rural consumers who are often marginalised. Because there is a limited number of health services in rural areas, they need to cater for all people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, residents not born in Australia, people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender, intersex or queer, those with low English literacy, young people, residents with disability, those from low socioeconomic neighbourhoods and others regularly excluded from health services.

Development of a toolkit: An ARC funded study is undertaking four case studies to understand how rural mainstream health services can increase their inclusiveness and responsiveness to the needs of diverse and particularly marginalised consumers.

Other projects include:
- Evaluation of Cultural Audits in Rural Health Services
- The Gana Burrai Research
- Engagement in an Aboriginal prosperity plan
- A Common Agenda for Indigenous Health policy

Key Publications


Rural Health Academic Network (RHAN)

A team of jointly-funded academics are based in five rural health services. As a network, this team works to support education and build research capacity in these services. In doing so, this team undertakes a range of evaluations, service development projects and supports the rural health workforce in research and professional development. Team members are interested in allied health workforce, maternity care, chronic conditions, aged care and the prevalence of obesity in rural areas.

Key Publications


The University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) seeks to work with local health services and communities to support the health workforce, increase access to services for consumers and improve quality of care. We work across northeast Victoria and the Grampians region in partnership with local health services.

**Contact Details:**

- **Shepparton**
  - +61 3 5823 4500
  - 49 Graham Street
  - PO Box 6500 SHEPPARTON VIC 3632

- **Wangaratta**
  - +61 3 5720 1700
  - "The Chalet", Docker Street
  - PO Box 386 WANGARATTA Vic 3676

- **Ballarat**
  - +61 3 4301 6800
  - "Dunvegan”
  - 806 Mair Street BALLARAT VIC 3350

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