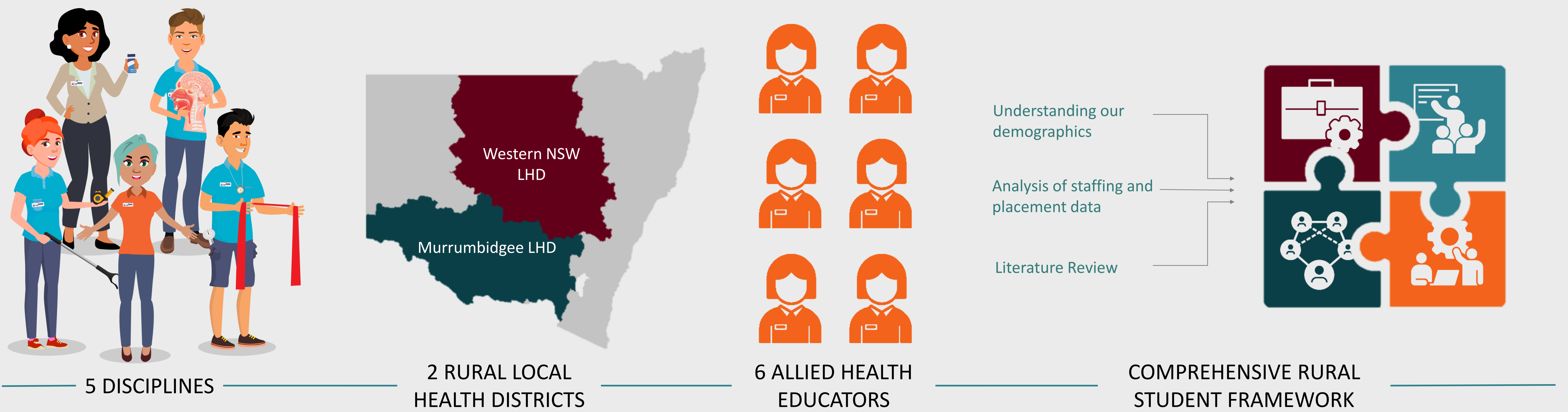


Regional Allied Health Student Program – A Cross Boundary Partnership

Nicola Lamb & Bethany Schofield

Targeting Allied Health rural workforce shortages through evidence-based student placement development. Empowering Allied Health teams to increase student placement offerings and improve the clinical and culturally immersive experiences of students in rural communities.



BACKGROUND

- Joint pilot program through the NSW Ministry of Health and Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development to fund 3 FTE Allied Health Educators between 6 individuals.
- Allied Health workforce initiative targeting early stages of the workforce pipeline in Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, Dietetics and Social Work.
- Primary focus to increase student placement offers in rural LHDs and improve student experience
- Murrumbidgee and Western NSW LHDs created a cross boarder Allied Health Education team to design a collaborative rural approach to placement improvement

Evidence demonstrates that longer, well supported, positive clinical placement experiences promote intent to work rurally on graduation for students of both urban and rural backgrounds.

SHORT TERM GOALS

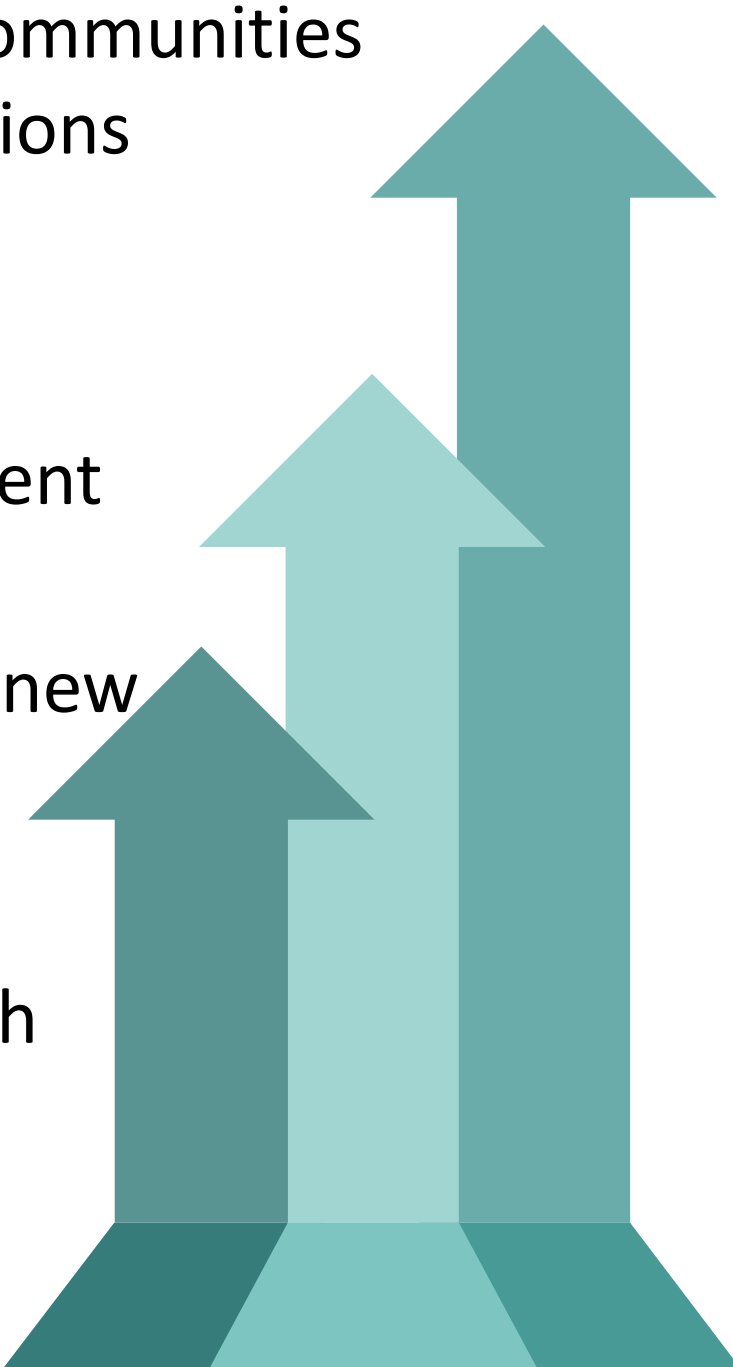
- Increase the number of rural placement offers
- Expose more students to rural communities and reduce negative misconceptions
- Improve placement experience

MID TERM GOALS

- Develop innovative rural placement models
- Support students transition into new graduate roles

LONG TERM GOALS

- Create a pipeline of Allied Health workers for the rural workforce
- Increase access to Allied Health services for rural communities



Murrumbidgee LHD have increased Allied Health student placement days in 2025 by

50%

THE RURAL STUDENT PLACEMENT FRAMEWORK

Developed by the project team through extensive data analysis, stakeholder consultation and literature review. It was designed to create a structured approach to addressing barriers to providing rural Allied Health student placements.

RESOURCES

Resources that have been developed to support students and educators include a supervisor toolkit, student orientation handbook, student tutorials, marketing tools and career pamphlets.

TRAINING

Training has been rolled out across both LHDs to clinicians and students focussing on supervision, reflective practice, clinical practice matters, and developing placement models. Training for managers of student supervisors and culturally sensitive placements is under development.

NETWORKS

Relationships with universities and UDRHs have been strengthened, inter-LHD educators are actively sharing learnings, rural student networks forming across sites and disciplines through group education and clinical schools.

SYSTEMS

The development of the Allied Health Student Placement procedure sets expectations for roles, responsibilities and placement capacity; outlines the process of developing rural placement models.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- 94.2% of students on rural placements within the program were satisfied with their placement experience
 - 83.1% of students say they are more likely to be interested in working in a rural area on graduation after completing their rural placement
- “...At Wagga Wagga Base Hospital you’re not just a student, you’re part of the team. Everyone was so welcoming and supportive, I loved it straight away and was excited to go back to tell my fellow students about my experience... I was confident and ready for a smooth transition into a new graduate role. I have only been here for a few weeks, but I am already amazed at how broad my caseload is.”

Katie - Speech Pathology student from Sydney
She and a friend moved back to Wagga Wagga to commence their new graduate careers as a rural clinicians

PLACEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Occupational Therapy Clinical School

Thirteen students completed voluntary, extended placements with a dedicated coordinator; benefiting from centralized orientation, targeted tutorials and personalized reflective practice.

Virtual Allied Health Placements

Western NSW LHD created new placement models in the Virtual Allied Health Service, equipping students with essential skills for the changing landscape of rural health service delivery.

Simulated Interprofessional Education

In partnership with Three Rivers UDRH, Murrumbidgee LHD developed a simulated patient journey and reflective practice workshop to engage students in interprofessional practice. This was delivered over both LHDs in 7 sites during 2024/2025 involving 126 students. Additional modules are in development in Western NSW.

Dietetics student coordinator

Murrumbidgee LHD partnered with a metropolitan university in Victoria to create a rural Dietetics placement experience. The funding from this model created a Dietetics Student Educator position to streamline orientation, co-ordination and support for students and clinicians alike.

14 new Allied Health teams across Western NSW hosted student placements for the first time in 2025

“Beth [the WNSWLHD Allied Health Educator] helped bridge the gap between thinking about taking students to actually booking a placement. Without Beth I don’t think I would have been supervising students at this stage.”

Courtney – Dietitian in Canowindra and first-time student supervisor

SUSTAINABILITY

Plan for 2026 and beyond

- Ongoing collaboration with existing teams to embed changes
- Implementation of the Allied Health student placement procedure to provide ongoing guidance for appropriate placement models and clarity of placement capacity expectations
- Interprofessional supervisor and student networks will allow clinicians and students to continue to connect and learn from each other
- Information and resources will be available through centralised intranet pages for ongoing use
- Promotion of the value of Allied Health Educator roles