



NORTHERN RIVERS
University Department of Rural Health

Strategic Plan

2006-2008

May 2006

Background

The Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health (NRUDRH) was established in 2001 under the *Regional Health Strategy* of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing. The NRUDRH is one of ten University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) established around Australia, and links to these other Departments through its membership of the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN). In 2006 the budget of the NRUDRH was increased to bring this in line with other UDRH.

The NRUDRH is a Department within The School of Public Health of the University of Sydney Faculty of Medicine, and is managed in collaboration with Southern Cross University (SCU). The NRUDRH has campus sites at Grafton and Murwillumbah Hospitals, with the main campus located opposite the Lismore Base Hospital. The acquirement of land and building packages over the establishment phase has provided the NRUDRH with a base from which to develop its infrastructure. Recent developments in Lismore will, by the end of 2006, provide a lecture theatre and office space and additional student accommodation.

The NRUDRH collaborates with the other rural initiatives both within the School of Public Health and the University of Sydney more broadly. Specifically, through the Australian Rural Health Research Collaboration, the NRUDRH is formally linked to the Broken Hill UDRH (University of Sydney), the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health & Safety (University of Sydney), the NSW Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health (University of Newcastle) and the NSW Area Health Services of the North Coast, Greater Western, & Hunter New England.

The NRUDRH also works closely with Southern Cross University, in particular the University's Division of Health and Applied Sciences. Southern Cross University has a strong health presence within the Northern Rivers region, and the NRUDRH works with this existing capacity to minimise duplication and catalyse further development to the benefit of both Universities and the region. Specifically the NRUDRH collaborates with SCU's College of Indigenous Australian Peoples (GNIBI), and Departments of Nursing and Health Care Practice, Natural and Complementary Medicine and Exercise Science and Sports Management.

As the major employer of health professionals in the Northern Rivers region, the Northern Coast Area Health Service (NCAHS) and NRUDRH have a close symbiotic relationship. The NRUDRH works in partnership with the NCAHS to provide education and training for the current and future health professional workforce and to provide outstanding health professionals with opportunities to undertake academic work in their field. This contributes to the ongoing recruitment and retention of health professionals to the Northern Rivers region. The NRUDRH will auspice over the period the North Coast Medical Education Collaboration that will develop year long placement of medical students from the University of Sydney, The University of Western Sydney, and the University of Wollongong.

The NRUDRH collaborates with local clinicians to develop and evaluate innovative models of care, and to foster world-class health research in the Northern Rivers region. The main areas of research are in Mental Health, Environmental Health, Health Services,

and Workforce Development. The NRUDRH links closely with the North Coast Area Health Service through the Population Health Planning and Planning Directorate, the Lismore Clinical Trials Group and more broadly through the Australian Rural Health Research Collaboration (ARHRC) and other peak research organisations such as the Sax Institute.

The NRUDRH collaborates with a range of other local services, including but not exclusive to the Aboriginal Medical Services at Casino and Grafton. The Indigenous health focus has been boosted with the employment of a full-time Indigenous Research Academic and 2006 sees the appointment of a full-time Indigenous Senior Lecturer.

Our Vision

To create a multidisciplinary centre of excellence in health education and research that is relevant to the health needs of our communities.

The NRUDRH strategic goals are as outlined in the Agreement between the Australian Department of Health and Ageing and the University of Sydney as follows:

Underlying all strategies is a commitment to a multidisciplinary approach with a public health outlook. The NRUDRH will also give priority to addressing health issues of specific relevance to the local Indigenous community.

1. increase and improve rural experiences, including training to encourage cultural awareness and sensitivity to Indigenous health issues for undergraduate students in the health professions.
2. expand educational opportunities relevant to rural and remote practice, in particular in relation to existing rural and remote health professionals and indigenous students.
3. undertake research into rural and remote health issues, including publications of papers and reports and applying for research grants and consultancies.
4. provide training and support for rural health professionals including mentors, supervisors and preceptors), consumers and communities, including indigenous communities.
5. contribute to innovation in education, research and service development through collaborations with universities, health services and professional and community organisations, including indigenous communities.
6. embrace a strong public health focus or population health focus: and contribute to the development of innovative service delivery models in rural and remote health.
7. endeavour to progress the rural health agenda within the medical and other health sciences faculties or departments to maximise the efficient use of resources provided for a range of rural health programs. These programs include, but are not limited to, the Rural Undergraduate Support and Coordination Program, the Primary Health Care Research Education Development program and the Rural Clinical Schools program.

University Department of Rural Health Program Goal	Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health Strategy
<p>1. Increase and improve rural experiences, including training to encourage cultural awareness and sensitivity to Indigenous health issues for undergraduate students in the health professions.</p>	Identify and coordinate opportunities for student placements.
	Target student placements to identified workforce needs.
	Expand training sites.
	Ensure all students are given an orientation including local recreational activities.
	Expand opportunities for communities to engage with students and supervisors.
	Increase student knowledge of the inter-relation of employment, health, and community lifestyle.
	Expand opportunities for Interdisciplinary learning.
	Expand opportunities for health equity and Indigenous learning.
	Evaluate undergraduate placement systems, processes, and student and teaching staff satisfaction.
<p>2. Expand educational opportunities relevant to rural and remote practice, in particular in relation to existing rural and remote health professionals and indigenous students.</p>	Expand opportunities for flexible and distance education units delivered locally.
	Create post-graduate education opportunities responsive to local need.
	Enhance library, internet databases and other educational infrastructure (including manikins) to support quality placements and education.
	Develop and support opportunities for local clinical-academic positions, pre-vocational GP placements, and Isolated Practice Peer supports.
	Evaluate educational systems, processes, and student and teaching staff satisfaction.
<p>3. Undertake research into rural and remote health issues, including publications of papers and reports and applying for research grants and consultancies.</p>	Build strategic partnerships with leading academic, government, community and private sector organisations to progress the research priorities of the NRUDRH.
	Develop strategic local, state, national and international partnerships to increase the profile of the NRUDRH research streams.
	Build NRUDRH track record of undertaking policy relevant research and facilitate the use of research in the policy process.

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	<p>Identify opportunities for joint research projects with the NCAHS & other organisations relevant to the NRUDRH research priorities and that is responsive to local, state & national needs.</p> <p>Add to the depth of NRUDRH staff academic track record in priority research areas by fostering high quality research and the continued growth of peer reviewed publications and grant and contract income.</p> <p>Develop two new priority research streams – workforce and indigenous health.</p> <p>Provide funding for students to undertake research projects with NRUDRH.</p> <p>Increase the capacity for local clinicians & staff to undertake primary health care research.</p>
<p>4. Provide training and support for rural health professionals including mentors, supervisors and preceptors, consumers and communities, including indigenous communities.</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with NCAHS, NRDGP, NCGPT, local Aboriginal Health & Medical Services and education providers to identify key needs for professional education for local clinicians, and develop strategies to address these needs.</p> <p>Increase and support available preceptors & supervisors</p> <p>Develop primary health care research & evaluation training relevant to the needs of the Northern Rivers area.</p> <p>Ensure qualified staff undertake the necessary training and complete the administrative requirements for post-graduate supervision.</p> <p>Allocate resources, training and provide supervision for postgraduate health research students.</p>
<p>5. Contribute to innovation in education, research and service development through collaborations with universities, health services and professional and</p>	<p>Build links to academic partners, health service providers and other organisations that are relevant to the NRUDRH priorities.</p> <p>Develop collaborative education, research, service and workforce development projects relevant to the needs of local Aboriginal communities. These collaborations will be targeted with, but not exclusive to local Aboriginal Health & Medical Services, the VET sector and local high schools.</p>

University Department of Rural Health Program Goal	Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health Strategy
community organisations, including indigenous communities.	In collaboration with partner organisations, promote local awareness of innovative models of health care practice
	Represent NRUDRH on committees that align with relevant NRUDRH work priorities and professional interests.
	Facilitate academic & professional exchanges between UDRH staff and staff from relevant state, national and international organisations.
6. Embrace a strong public health focus or population health focus and contribute to the development of innovative service delivery models in rural and remote health.	Undertake research, evaluation and service development consultancies in rural public and population health.
	Communicate research findings and developments in health to the wider community through media releases, conference attendance and presentation and also local seminars.
	In collaboration with partner organisations, maintain effective mechanisms to identify the public health needs of the population of rural and remote areas so as to inform NRUDRH education, research and service development activities.
7. Endeavour to progress the rural health agenda within the medical and other health sciences faculties or departments to maximise the efficient use of resources provided for a range of rural health programs. These programs include, but are not limited to, the Rural Undergraduate Support and Coordination Program, the Primary Health Care	Promote the application of University of Sydney and Southern Cross University through the NRUDRH to support health service development and delivery in the Northern Rivers region.
	Facilitate partnership and efficient use of resources with the medical schools of the Universities of Sydney, Western Sydney and Wollongong through the development of the North Coast Medical Education Collaboration.
	Administer development and expansion of NRUDRH human and physical resources.
	Build a culture of support and collegiality by promoting teaching and research projects across NRUDRH and wider universities with particular attention to the cultural diversity of staff.
	Ensure appropriate information technology infrastructure and programs are in place to support progression and promotion of the rural health agenda.
Contribute to the continuing education, training and development of employees	

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Research Evaluation and Development program and the Rural Clinical Schools program.	Ensure appropriate infrastructure to support staff and student increases with UDRH expansion. Adopt and incorporate core organisational vision and values into all activities