

Rural Placement Guide

Updated June 2019

the future of rural health

About us

National Rural Health Student Network

The National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) represents the future of rural health in Australia. It has more than 9,000 members who belong to 28 university Rural Health Clubs from all states and territories.

It is Australia's only multidisciplinary student health network, bringing together people studying medicine, nursing and allied health, encouraging them to pursue rural health careers.

The NRHSN aims to:

- ▶ provide a voice for students who are interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians; and
- ▶ promote rural health careers to students and encourage students who are interested in practising in rural health care.

The NRHSN and its Rural Health Clubs offer rural experience weekends, career information sessions and professional development activities as well as providing a social base for students at university and when on rural placement.

The student network leaders also advocate on behalf of health students of all disciplines - including opportunities for more rural placements and training support.

Rural Workforce Agencies

The NRHSN is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Health administered as a consortium by the Rural Workforce Agencies. The NSW Rural Doctors Network is the RWA managing the NRHSN on behalf of the Consortium.

Each Australian State and the Northern Territory is served by a government-designated RWA that works to improve access to high-quality healthcare for people in remote, regional and rural Australia. RWAs do this through a range of programs, services and initiatives that attract, recruit, retain and support GPs, nurses and allied health professionals in rural and remote communities.

Contact us

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Rural Health Clubs

1. ARMS	Australian National University, ACT
2. AURHA	Adelaide University, SA
3. BREATHHE	University of Newcastle, NSW
4. BUSHFIRE	Bond University, QLD
5. CARAH	Charles Darwin University, NT in assoc with Flinders University, SA
6. CRANC	University of Canberra, ACT
7. FURHS	Flinders University, SA
8. HOPE4HEALTH	Griffith University, QLD
9. KRASH	Notre Dame University, Broome, WA
10. LARHC	La Trobe University, Bendigo, VIC
11. MIRAGE	University of Sydney, NSW
12. MURHC	Macquarie University, NSW
13. NERCHA	University of New England, NSW
14. NOMAD	Deakin University, VIC
15. OUTLOOK	University of Melbourne, VIC
16. RAHMS	University of New South Wales, NSW
17. RHINO	James Cook University, QLD
18. Rh+	Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW
19. RHUWS	Western Sydney University, NSW
20. ROUNDS	Notre Dame University, Sydney, NSW
21. ROUSTAH	University of South Australia, SA
22. RUSTICA	University of Tasmania, TAS
23. SHARP	University of Wollongong, NSW
24. SPINRPHX	Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
25. STARRH	Charles Darwin University, NT including Flinders University, NT
26. TROHPIQ	University of Queensland, QLD
27. WAALHIIBE	Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
28. WILDFIRE	Monash University, VIC

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Recommended reading

- ▶ When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill, the NRHSN Mental Health Guide
- ▶ [Australian Rural Health Education Network \(ARHEN\) University Departments of Rural Health Clinical Placements contact guide](#)
- ▶ [Services for Australian Remote and Rural Allied Health's Transition Toolkit to Rural and Remote Practice](#)
- ▶ [ARHEN A textbook of Australian Rural Health](#)

Why should I consider rural placement?

Rural and remote placements are an opportunity to expand your skills, experience different communities and broaden your horizons.

They can enhance your professional development and confidence through:

- ▶ hands on learning in varied and sometimes challenging environments
- ▶ team-based, innovative approaches to patient care
- ▶ opportunity for greater autonomy and responsibility.

The social side of rural health has an added bonus. Meeting new people in professional and social settings can lead to lifelong friendships, mentorships and working relationships.

By embracing a community and learning about its health needs, you will discover how your chosen path of study can make a difference later on in your career.

Rural and remote placements can also introduce you to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Listen, observe and understand more about Indigenous culture if you are fortunate enough to have the chance to do so.

This guide is designed to help you make the most of these experiences. It offers a number of tips from others who have gone before you about how to plan, prepare and enjoy your placement.

Make sure you check out our handy fridge magnets and checklists for placements. The NRHSN also has a mental health guide “When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill” for rural placements which complements this guide.

So, what are you waiting for? Go rural!

How do I prepare?

It is important to have a clear understanding of what you want to achieve and what is expected of you for your placement. Time spent upfront on planning will pave the way for a successful placement. If you're well organised and do some research, you can hit the ground running.

Check in with your university

If you have a placement organised for you, make sure to find out who your placement coordinator is - they will have info about your dates, placement location, whether there will be other students there and the support available. Some universities may not organise rural placements, check in about the requirements for your course and see if you can do it yourself. You may be able to access funding for expenses such as travel and accommodation. It is also a good idea to find out if anyone has done the same placement before as they may also be able to give you some advice and information.

Transport

Before setting off on your placement, think about how you will get there and how you will get around town once you arrive. Options might include train, bus, plane, taxi, cycling or driving (hire car or your own car). If driving, consider the condition of your car and your experience travelling long distances. If you are going on placement with other students, you may consider carpooling.

Many rural and remote communities have very limited (if any) public transport. It's good to consider the options as part of your pre-planning. Find out what the distance is between your proposed accommodation, the health service you will be working in. Can you walk there, or will you need transport? There may be taxis in the town, or you may need to consider taking your bike or hiring one once you're there.

Accommodation

One of the biggest factors in any rural placement is where you are going to stay. Investigate early what accommodation is available and ask if there is anything available through your university, the local health services or your workplace. Ask your university placement coordinator if they can recommend somewhere and whether there are any costs associated.

In planning your home away from home, think about what you'll need. For example, will there be cooking facilities, utensils, bed linen, laundry, TV, a fridge and internet? Also ensure you know the contact details for the accommodation provider, including arrangements for picking up your keys on arrival.

Community

To make the most of your stay, try and find out a bit about the town before you go.

A good place to start is the internet. You should be able to track down population profiles, climate, regional characteristics and local attractions as well as services and recreational facilities.

If you enjoy the movies, see if they have a cinema. If you're religious, seek out the nearest place of worship. If you're into fitness, find out if there is a gym or local sporting clubs (the latter being a great way to get involved with the community).

At a practical level, banks and shops in rural and remote areas may have different opening hours compared to the city. You'll also need to check availability of internet and mobile coverage. It might be handy to download a town map.

Other good sources of local knowledge are Tourist Information Centres and the health service to which you will be assigned.

Family and friends

A rural placement can be a great adventure but don't be surprised if you feel a bit homesick at times. It's perfectly natural to miss family and friends while you're away.

Staying in touch is one way of beating the blues, so think how you might do this before you leave. Will there be mobile coverage? Is there going to be internet access for email and Skype?

While you may miss your loved ones, you can still enjoy your country experience by getting involved as much as possible.

Go out and join in community events and meetings, sporting activities, markets, and service clubs while you are there. Be open to social invitations from colleagues and people you meet outside of work. Take time to explore the local area.

Keeping a journal while you are away is a positive activity that will keep you focused on what you have seen, learnt and discovered.

If you are on placement with other students take the time to get to know them, chances are they will be experiencing similar challenges to you!

Supervisor

A phone call or email to your placement clinical supervisor to introduce yourself is a great opportunity to discuss your placement, ask questions and prepare yourself as best you can before you arrive.

You should try to determine what your expected tasks and caseload will be like by talking to students who have previously done placement there and to your supervisor. You might want to find out about your work hours, uniform/dress code, available facilities for study, who you will be working with, whether there will be other students, whether you need to take anything with you and what is expected of you.

Contact details

Record the contact details of your placement coordinator/supervisor, University support services and family/friends (ensuring they also have yours!) before you go.

Cultural awareness

All communities have their own cultural identity. This varies across rural and remote Australia with its mix of mining, farming, tourism and Indigenous culture. As the new kid in town, being respectful and maintaining an open mind is important when on placement.

Remember that flexibility, sensitivity, respect for difference, a non-judgemental approach and optimism will help you develop constructive relationships within a new community. Undertaking Indigenous cultural awareness training before placement can help you too. It is a great way to develop an understanding of



Indigenous culture and avoid actions that may offend community members, which can in turn negatively impact on the provision of health care and your experience.

Some universities, Rural Workforce Agencies and workplaces provide Indigenous cultural awareness training. See if this is available to you. Once on the ground, be prepared to listen to advice from Aboriginal Health Workers and experienced local health professionals.

Keeping safe on placement

Looking after yourself on placement also involves attention to personal safety. This applies to clinical and non-clinical situations.

Some tips to consider:

- ▶ make an informal risk assessment for yourself considering issues such as transport, accommodation (including the availability of a phone and mobile coverage) and supervision before you go
- ▶ avoid walking around the town or community by yourself at night in unlit or isolated areas
- ▶ ask a local mentor if there are any places that should be avoided in the community for cultural or safety reasons
- ▶ ensure you have the appropriate driving skills if driving over unsealed roads and tell someone if you do not feel confident. Plan your travel to, from and around the community, identify fuel availability, weather and road warnings and always carry maps and water
- ▶ tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back, even by an SMS to a friend, if leaving the community for sightseeing
- ▶ when beginning your placement, ask about safety procedures, personal alarms and local procedures in the case of an aggressive patient
- ▶ do not approach or confront an aggressive patient or community member, ensure your safety first and follow the advice of your supervisors
- ▶ avoid getting involved in personal disputes between community members
- ▶ observe local customs in terms of culturally appropriate dress
- ▶ lock your accommodation and car
- ▶ keep track of your valuables (i.e. wallet, ID, cash) – either keep them somewhere safe or with you.

Managing disclosures

There are times on placement when you will be challenged. For example, you may encounter patients who have experienced physical, emotional and/or mental abuse. They are likely to be very distressed and this may put significant stress on you. It's important to know what to do in these situations and to be very clear about the local protocols for managing disclosure.

If a person discloses an abusive experience, you should explain to the person that you need to advise your supervisor and that the issue will be treated in strict confidence. Your supervisor has the advanced skills and professional contacts necessary to deal with these situations.

Under national guidelines, some situations need to be reported and your supervisor will manage this. Mandatory reporting requirements in most states and territories mean that instances of abuse need to be reported to the appropriate bodies if young people are involved. This can include the State or Territory Child Protection Agency and the police but varies between localities. Read up on the local guidelines before commencing your placement.

It is crucial to ask your supervisor for advice as soon as possible and let them deal with the situation. However, if you're in a situation where you are the only person available, do not ask leading questions, but let the person you are consulting with tell the story in their own words, as this can influence further investigation. Document the conversation in the patient notes using an 'I said', 'he/she said' format, if possible, trying to use their exact words. This should be countersigned by your supervisor.

Remember to:

- ▶ make sure you talk with your supervisor when you first start your placement
- ▶ be fully aware of the process of reporting disclosure before you begin your placement
- ▶ ask your supervisor direct questions about what to do if cases are presented to you regarding issues such as sexual abuse, physical or mental abuse
- ▶ make sure that you debrief with skilled people and use the support services that are listed in this guide. They are there to help you. Your supervisor and university should also provide support for you.

What should I do if things go wrong?

Despite all the best planning and intentions, sometimes things can go wrong. You may not get along with your supervisor, your accommodation might not be what you expected, you may not be achieving what you wanted from your placement, you might be feeling lonely or missing home, friends and family. The good news is that these issues can usually be sorted out and a successful placement can still be achieved. The first thing to do is establish what is not going right and the reasons why.

Always try to talk out any problem with the local health team and supervisor. They may be able to rectify the situation or have ideas to overcome the issue. It may be a miscommunication, misunderstanding or different interpretation of an event that can be resolved by open and honest discussion. This is good practice for the real world when you graduate.

It is also good to speak with your university placement coordinator as they will know what options are available to you and will have suggestions for how to resolve the issue. They are also outside of the situation, so will be able to give you an external point of view.

Other students who are on placement with you, or who have had similar experiences in the past may also be able to offer advice. If you are unwell or unable to attend a day or more of your placement, it is important to inform your supervisor as soon as you can. It may also be necessary to inform your university too.

If you are feeling lonely or things are not going well personally, then contacting family or friends might help. Other support services include your university support/counselling service or national support lines where people are there to listen and help you work through solutions.

Contact numbers and websites for useful placement help and support services are listed in this guide. You can also find very useful contacts and information in the NRHSN's mental health guide 'When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill' which you can find at www.nrhsn.org.au.

After your placement

It is always helpful for universities to receive feedback on your placement experience once you have completed the placement to help with future placements. It is also a good opportunity for you to reflect on what you learned and achieved and what you might like to learn more about.

Scholarships

Some rural and remote placements will be subsidised or paid for by your university, however not all universities cover these costs. Investigate what scholarships are available that may help you to meet the costs of your rural or remote placement or provide other opportunities for you to undertake a placement in a rural community. Check out the [NRHSN's guide to multidisciplinary opportunities](#).

Information and support pages

National Rural Health Student Network

Information on who your local rural health club is or one that might operate in the area you will be on placement in, mental health guide and other handy resources.

www.nrhsn.org.au

Department of Health

Find out about a number of different scholarships and rural health initiatives.

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-st

Australian College of Nursing

Information for nursing students, they also have state-based requirements to attend clinical placements.

www.acn.edu.au/education/clinical-placement-information

Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine

www.acrrm.org.au/home

Australian Human Rights Commission

www.humanrights.gov.au

Australian Indigenous Health Info Net



Helping to close the gap by providing the evidence base to inform practise and policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

healthinonet.ecu.edu.au

Australian Rural Health Education Network

Great information on clinical placements from University Departments of Rural Health all over Australia.

arhen.org.au

CRANAplus

Offer Bush Support Services, including free and confidential 24-hour support and debriefing service for students and health professionals in rural and remote Australia. Lots of other resources, particularly for students interested in remote nursing.

1800 805 391 - Bush Support Services

crana.org.au

Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators

FRAME is made up of representatives from initiatives under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program.

www.ausframe.org

Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Resources to help you learn about Indigenous culture before starting your placement.

iaha.com.au

Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education

Case studies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research and resources specifically for medical students.

www.limenetwork.net.au

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Clinical resources and information about pathways.

www.racgp.org.au

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Information about retrieval services and helpful to find out more about what they do as you may have a lot of interaction with them in rural and remote Australia.

www.flyingdoctor.org.au

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health

Resources for allied health students about placements and career pathways, including the Allied Health Rural Generalist pathway and a Transition Toolkit to Remote and Rural Practice.

sarrah.org.au

State based rural placement information and services

Tasmania

Department of Health and Human Services www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

HR+ - Rural Workforce Agency www.hrplustas.com.au

South Australia

SA Health www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet

Rural Doctors Workforce Agency www.ruraldoc.com.au

Western Australia

Department of Health ww2.health.wa.gov.au

Rural Health West www.ruralhealthwest.com.au

Northern Territory

Department of Health health.nt.gov.au

NT PHN - Rural Workforce Agency www.ntphn.org.au

Queensland

Queensland Health www.health.qld.gov.au

Health Workforce Queensland - Rural Workforce Agency www.healthworkforce.com.au

New South Wales

NSW Health www.health.nsw.gov.au



NSW Rural Doctors Network - Rural Workforce Agency www.nswrdn.com.au

Victoria

Health Victoria www2.health.vic.gov.au

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria www.rwav.com.au

Australian Capital Territory

ACT Health www.health.act.gov.au

NSW Rural Doctors Network - Rural Workforce Agency www.nswrdn.com.au