

## Strategic Directions 2019-2023

### Introduction:

The Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BH UDRH) is a rural clinical school of the Sydney Medical School, Faculty of Medicine and Health at the University of Sydney.

The BH UDRH was established in 1997 and is based in far west region of NSW. It serves a resident population of around 45,000 across a footprint that includes the LGAs of Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Cobar (far north west), Balranald and Wentworth (far south west) and Broken Hill, Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area.

The main educational facility is located at Broken Hill. The BH UDRH has also established academic centres at Bourke in the North West and Dareton in the South West.

This document outlines the strategic directions and key strategies of the BH UDRH that should contribute to the recruitment and retention of health professionals in rural and remote Australia, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program.

### Our Mission:

To contribute to the Australian Government Initiative (RHMT Program) that aims to improve the recruitment and retention of medical, dental, nursing and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia.

To achieve this the BH UDRH aims to:

- provide a rich, authentic, learning experience that prepares students for professional practice
- undertake research that supports the development of a sustainable workforce and accessible health services for rural and remote Australians
- work with our communities and strengthen local capacity to respond to contemporary health challenges

### Our Vision:

A sustainable rural health workforce that contributes to health and wellbeing of rural and remote Australia

## Strategic Directions

### Priority Area 1. Regional Responsiveness

#### Goal

To be guided by regional stakeholders on the overall direction of the Department, with accountability to the region, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the RHMT Program.

#### Key Strategies

##### 1. Progress the Sunraysia Collaboration

Monash Rural Health and the BH UDRH (South West Academic Centre) have agreed to develop an integrated strategic and operational plan for the Sunraysia region and surrounds to enhance the capacity of both universities to meet the objectives of the RHMT multidisciplinary program, not constrained by state boundaries or university networks. The Collaboration will focus on serving the following LGAs: Wentworth, Balranald, Mildura and Swan Hill. Each University will contribute independently and collectively to achieve the shared strategic and operational objectives for the RHMT program across the whole region.

##### 2. Establish a North West Regional Advisory Committee

The Far North West region of NSW is one of the few regions in NSW that supports number of small isolated rural and remote communities without a major regional centre, or a strong regional administrative base. The need for, and perceived value of, strong regional representation is reflected in the establishment of the Far North West NSW Joint Organization in Local Government to provide leadership and progress intergovernmental cooperation that promote community and regional development. The North West Academic Centre (NWAC) will consult with regional partners in health, social services and school education about establishing a RHMT Regional Advisory Committee, or other processes to provide advice on the implementation of the RHMT in the region and guidance on the overall direction of the NWAC.

##### 3. Review Far West Regional Governance Processes

The BH UDRH has established or contributes to multiple program specific governance groups that oversee the collaborative work of the department. This includes key program areas such as the Broken Hill Extended Clinical Placement Program (long stay medical student training), School Health Hubs (Allied Health and Nursing student Service-Learning Programs), FWLHD School-based Primary Health Care Nurse-Led Service (Health Service innovation), Far West NSW Medical Careers Pathway Steering Committee (Regional Training Hub). While each of these groups provide for effective governance of specific programs, there is no formal process that seeks input from key regional stakeholders for the overall direction of the department as was previously mandated through the UDRH Regional Advisory Committee. It is proposed that the BH UDRH review current regional governance processes and consider options to ensure effective regional input and oversight going forward.

## **Priority Area 2: Community Engagement**

### **Goal**

To undertake programs and projects that are responsive to the needs of our communities and include community input to the design and delivery of student placements and other research, evaluation and development work.

### **Key Strategies**

#### **1. Optimizing School Health Hubs**

The establishment of a service-learning program delivered by speech pathology students in Broken Hill Primary Schools in 2009 began a decade of close collaboration between the BH UDRH, School Education, and Local Health District that has resulted in improved access for children and adolescents to allied health services as well as provision of care navigation for school pupils with complex health care needs. The construction of multipurpose School Health Hubs (an initiative of the BH UDRH) in each primary school in 2016 has supported an expansion of the service-learning programs to four disciplines as well as the recent setting up of an LHD funded school-based primary health care nurse-led service. The BH UDRH will continue to invest in the development of the School Health Hubs and associated services that contribute to both student learning and improved access to health care for children and adolescents in far west NSW.

#### **2. Towards Culturally Competent Practice**

The BH UDRH has delivered cross-cultural workshops for students and health staff in far west NSW since 2003. Our Aboriginal academic staff who lead the cross-cultural programs have recently modified the program to include the preparation of action plans by participants that would promote discussion about, and adoption of, more culturally appropriate practices in their workplace. The team also advises and supports other Aboriginal Organizations and communities within the BH UDRH footprint and beyond to develop and deliver locally relevant cross-cultural workshops. The focus for the department is to increase access to locally delivered cross cultural training and the provision of more culturally appropriate health care across far west NSW.

## Priority Area 3: Enhanced Student Training

### Goal

To apply evidence-informed approaches to student education and training, enhancing student responsiveness to rural and remote health care through rural exposure.

### Key Strategies

#### 1. Prepare for Extended Allied Health and Nursing Clinical Placements

Longer placements, community engaged practice and good training support enhance student learning, service contribution and likelihood of future rural employment. The average length of placement for nursing and allied health students is 5 weeks and currently only social work students have extended placements, greater than 12 weeks. The introduction of service-learning programs in Broken Hill has demonstrated UDRHs that can provide quality training for groups of allied health students that was not possible before. The National Rural Health Commissioner has proposed there be greater investment in rural training for Allied Health. It would be possible to redesign our clinical placement program for several allied health disciplines and nursing to deliver 6 months of integrated clinical training for 12 students per discipline with access to the formal educational sessions and structured learning delivered both locally and from main campus to meet formal curriculum requirements. Using the RCS model, feeder universities could establish a rural stream for their students and UDRHs provide local academic support. Our experience with the Broken Hill Extended Clinical Placement Program for Medicine indicates that it would be feasible to include students from multiple universities to ensure we maintain adequate numbers to justify investment in the program. Broken Hill alone could accommodate a combined program of five or more disciplines including nursing and medicine with 60-80 students on extended placements between 4-12 months throughout the year.

#### 2. Renewal of Extended Clinical Placement Program [ECPP]

The ECPP has been operating for 10 years and was formally reviewed in 2019. The review concluded that the ECPP has been very successful in delivering a complex program of extended placements for medical students from three universities in the remote regional city of Broken Hill and satellite sites of Wilcannia, Menindee and Bourke. The review made 10 recommendations to assure the sustainability of the program going forward under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program, with continuation of an appropriate level of funding. To enable the renewal of the program to be undertaken before the end of this funding cycle (2020) and to prepare for the introduction of the Murray Darling Medical School Network, the BHUDRH will recruit one additional medical/ public health academic on a fixed-term basis to lead negotiations in accordance with the review recommendations viz: with the three participating universities (Recommendation 2); the Australian and NSW Governments and local health services ( Recommendations 5 and 6); and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (Recommendation 7). This will also include, *inter alia*, reviewing the content of the ENRICH program to improve its currency, relevance and appeal to all ECPP and other participants.

## **Priority Area 4: Improved Workforce Outcomes**

### **Goal**

To establish regionally based programs that contribute to a sustainable, relevant and responsive Australian-trained further rural and remote health workforce.

### **Key Strategies**

#### **1. Establish a Regional Approach to Medical Workforce Development**

In 2016, the Australian Government announced the Integrated Rural Training Pipeline for Medicine Initiative to provide additional training and support for regional efforts to build and maintain an appropriately skilled medical workforce. As part of this Initiative, a regional training hub administered by the BH UDRH has been established in far west NSW to address the medical workforce maldistribution by contributing to the training and support for medical students, prevocational and vocational trainees - both rural generalists and other medical specialists. A Far West NSW Medical Careers Pathway Steering Committee with cross-agency representation has been established as part of this program to, *inter alia*, generate a common vision for the provision of quality medical services in the region, and create and maintain job designs, organizational arrangements, and employment conditions that enable individual practitioners to deliver care effectively and flexibly across organizations as required, and provide coordinated training opportunities for medical students and trainees, and build local training capacity.

#### **2. Develop Allied Health and Nursing Career Pathways in Far West NSW**

The establishment of training and employment [i.e. career] pathways for nursing and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia that is linked to the work of UDRHs and other agencies that support rural clinical exposure for health students will further increase the likelihood of rural employment for Australian training health professionals and a sustainable rural and remote health workforce. There is a need to develop rural training and employment systems for health professionals that create rural career opportunities that are clearly articulated, promoted and structured, and that supports early career professionals to stay in the rural workforce, although progress has been made in medicine with the establishment of regional training Hubs and the focus on developing employment pathways for rural generalist medicine. The outcomes of the National Rural Health Commissioner's paper on options for the Commonwealth Government Policy reform and investment in Allied Health will address these issues and the BH UDRH needs to work with regional partners to determine how to best support the development of nursing and allied health career pathways in far west NSW.

## **Priority Area 5: Research, Evaluation and Development**

### **Goal**

To contribute to the evidence on rural and remote Australian health workforce and service delivery, including impacts and outcomes, through undertaking research and building research capacity

### **Key Strategies**

#### **1. Increase the Research Contribution of the BH UDRH**

The BH UDRH plans and implements research projects in partnership with key regional stakeholders, and in collaboration with other research organizations, in the areas of rural health workforce development, health services research, public health and primary health care. The Department also invests in processes for the translation of research outcomes into improved policy and practice including publication of results in relevant media, working with government and industry peak bodies, and implementing education and training. The focus for research over the next 5 years will be on the evaluation of key strategic priorities for the department in student training, health career pathways and health services development and delivery.

#### **2. Build Research Capacity in Far West NSW**

The sustainability of our research organization and support for research active health services in far west NSW includes arrangements that ensure adequate skills and resources are directed to maintaining and extending the research capacity of the BH UDRH and developing capacity in our regionally-based health services. These arrangements incorporate support for higher degree research students in region, delivery of novice rural researcher development programs and provision of research methods short courses, workshops and conference attendance.