Your Rural Placement Guide
Make the most of your rural placement
Acknowledgements

The National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) would like to thank the NRHSN members as well as the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) and the Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators (FRAME) for their contribution and development of this Guide.

Created by U-bahn design, October 2015.

Recommended readings

- When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill, the NRHSN mental health guide
- Australian Rural Health Education Network’s Placements in UDRHs – A Guide
- Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health’s Transition Toolkit to Remote and Rural Practice
- CRANAplus clinical procedures for remote and rural practice
- Central Australian Rural Practitioners Association (CARPA) reference manual
- CARPA standard treatment manual
- State Country Health Service rural placement guides
- Women’s business manual
- No Shame Job: a health career information guide for Indigenous students
- Opportunities as vast as the landscape: working in rural and remote health
- ‘Australia’s rural and remote health: a social justice perspective’, by Janie Dade Smith
- ‘Bridging cultures in Aboriginal health’, by Binang Goonj
Contents

National Rural Health Student Network 4
Why should I consider a rural placement? 6
How do I prepare? 8
Keeping safe on placement 11
Managing disclosures 12
What should I do if things go wrong? 13
After your placement 14
Scholarships 14
Information and support 16
Placement contacts 19
Essential placement checklist 20
Rural Health Workforce Australia 23
References 23
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 careers in rural health.

The NRHSN has two aims:

- to provide a voice for students who are interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians
- to 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.

The NRHSN is managed by Rural Health Workforce Australia (RHWA) with funding from the Australian Government’s Department of Health.

www.nrhsn.org.au

Rural Health Clubs around Australia

1. ARMS  Australian National University, ACT
2. AURHA  Adelaide University, SA
3. BREAATHHE  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. MARHS  Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW, including La Trobe University Wodonga, VIC
12. MIRAGE  University of Sydney, 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. RHUUWS University of Western Sydney, NSW
19. ROUNDS Notre Dame University, Sydney, NSW
20. ROUSTAH University of South Australia, SA
21. RUSTICA University of Tasmania, TAS
22. SHARP University of Wollongong, NSW
23. SPINRPHEX Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
24. STARRH Charles Darwin University, NT, including Flinders University, NT
25. TROHPIQ University of Queensland, QLD
26. WAALHIIBE Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
27. WARRIAHS Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW
28. WILDFIRE Monash University, VIC
Why should I consider a rural placement?

Rural and remote placements are an opportunity to expand your skills, experience different communities, cultures, healthcare models, 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 particular 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.

We’ve also included some practical tools such as checklists and links to online resources.

There are many types of rural placements on offer (organised by your university or organised by yourself) and there are many state and university based rural placement guides (eg. Placements in UDRHs – A Guide) that will help you to work out what type of rural placement you want to experience.

So what are you waiting for? Go rural!
"I've been inspired by those who embrace the challenge of delivering health care in extraordinary settings, who commit to deliver care appropriately in line with the culture and wishes of the patient, and who have enabled me to enfold myself in the absolute humanity that permeates every moment of rural health."

Laura Sharley, AURHA Rural Health Club, University of Adelaide
A wise person once said ‘begin with the end in mind’. This approach will help guide you as you prepare to embark on your placement journey. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what you want to achieve and what is expected of you. There are also a number of practical considerations along the way.

Time spent upfront on planning will pave the way for a successful placement. If you’re well organised and do some research, you will hit the ground running.

Being prepared and organised before leaving will help make your placement a fun and rewarding experience. Refer to the ‘essential placement checklist’ starting on page 20 to help you.

Meanwhile, here are a few essentials to consider when planning your placement.

**Check in with your university**

Most universities have placement coordinators who can provide dates, duration and locations of available placements.

Ask your university placement coordinator whether you will need to organise your rural placement or if they will assist or organise it. Some universities will cover the cost of or subsidise expenses like travel and accommodation.

**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.

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 and amenities. Can you walk there or will you need transport? There may be taxis in the town or you might 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; 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. And 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.

For those going to more remote communities, you may experience varying degrees of culture shock. Do some reading on this before you go. The NRHSN’s mental health guide ‘When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill’ is a good start.

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 want to actually ‘learn’ medicine, in theory AND in practice, nothing beats seeing as many patients as you can, and rural placements are the best environment to do that”

Patryck Lloyd-Donald, WILDFIRE Rural Health Club, Monash University
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. You will be able to discuss your work hours, uniform or dress code, available facilities such as a computer or library, 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 and supervisor on page 19 of this guide, so the information is easily accessible when you need it.

Remember to include your university website and support/counselling service contact details on page 16.

Also keep a list of contact details for family and friends (and make sure they have your contact details while you are away).

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.

The following tips are designed to help:

- 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 about 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 etc.
- When beginning your placement, ask about safety procedures, personal alarms and location of a ‘safe room’ or location in the event 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.
- Do not get involved or take sides in personal disputes between community members.
- Observe local customs in terms of culturally appropriate dress.
- Lock your accommodation.

A general safety principle to keep in mind is do not do anything that you would not do at home. Also, follow the local policies and guidelines - there will be a reasonable rationale for them.
Managing disclosures

There are times on placement when you will be challenged. It’s how we grow and learn.

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.

This information should not take the place of the local protocols of the health service of your placement. It is meant to be a starting point to consider issues that may arise.

Remember:
- 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.

The most important thing to remember is to seek help or advice if things do start to go wrong. Often, they can be sorted out easily and with the best outcomes for everyone, as long as you let people know something is wrong.
After your placement

It is always helpful for universities to receive feedback on your placement experience once you have completed the placement so as to help with future placements. It is also a good opportunity for you to reflect on what you learnt 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 website www.nrhsn.org.au for scholarships that may be available.
Information and support

Your university website should provide information specific to rural placements and provide Support/ Counselling services.

University:
Website:
Contact phone number:

Useful links

National Rural Health Student Network
Includes links to the Rural Health Clubs based at universities throughout Australia, Placements in UDRHs – A Guide produced by ARHEN and the mental health guide ‘When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill’

www.nrhsn.org.au

Department of Health (DoH)

www.health.gov.au

Australian College of Nursing (ACN)

www.acn.edu.au

Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

www.acrrm.org.au

Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN)
Includes links to University Departments of Rural Health and the resource Placements in UDRHs – A Guide.

www.arhen.org.au

CRANAplus

www.cranaplus.org.au

National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA)

www.ruralhealth.org.au

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

www.racgp.org.au

Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS)

www.flyingdoctor.org.au

Rural and Remote Medical Education Online

www.rrmeo.com

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)
Transition Toolkit to Remote and Rural Practice

www.sarrah.org.au
## State base rural placement guidelines and information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Health South Australia</th>
<th><a href="http://www.countryhealthsa.sa.gov.au">www.countryhealthsa.sa.gov.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia Country Health Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au">www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Health</td>
<td><a href="http://www.health.qld.gov.au">www.health.qld.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory Government</td>
<td><a href="http://www.health.nt.gov.au">www.health.nt.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>beyondblue</th>
<th><a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1300 224 636</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bush Support Services</th>
<th>1800 805 391</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.crana.org.au">www.crana.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeline</th>
<th>131 114</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mensline</th>
<th>1300 789 978</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.menslineaus.org.au">www.menslineaus.org.au</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sane</th>
<th>1800 187 263</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.sane.org">www.sane.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctors Health Advisory Service</th>
<th><a href="http://www.dhas.org.au">www.dhas.org.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Indigenous and multicultural health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet</th>
<th><a href="http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au">www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reconciliation Australia</th>
<th><a href="http://www.reconciliation.org.au">www.reconciliation.org.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
**Placement contacts**

**University placement coordinator**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact person’s phone number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Placement details**

| Contact person’s name: |
| Contact person’s phone number: |
| Location: |
| Dates: |
| Address for accommodation: |
| Phone number for accommodation: |
| Travel arrangements: |

**Notes**

---

Build up a good relationship with your supervisor or mentor while you are on your placement. Ask questions, see patients, get involved and increase your skill set. The more interest that you show your mentor, the better your relationship and placement experience will be.
Essential placement checklist

General

☐ Have you spoken to your supervisor and discussed your expectations and their expectations?

☐ Have you spoken to your university placements supervisor about possible subsidies, reimbursement and costs?

☐ Have you spoken to your university placements supervisor about whether you need to arrange individual indemnity insurance for your placement?

☐ What facilities will be available to you (computer, internet, shops, library etc)?

☐ Have you considered applying for a scholarship?

☐ How will you keep in touch with friends and family?

What to pack

☐ Itinerary

☐ Indemnity insurance cover letter

☐ Towels, linen, alarm clock, food etc (if needed)

☐ Do you need to take any resources/text books with you?

☐ Student ID card/badge

☐ Immunisation papers

☐ Criminal record clearance

☐ Working With Children Check

☐ Money - small amount of cash, not only credit/EFTPOS cards

☐ Camera - take lots of photos as you are bound to have a ball! Remember that photos in some Indigenous communities may not be welcomed, so be sure to ask permission.
Transport

- Do you know the best transport option to get to your placement? i.e. Bus, train, plane or drive your own car?

- Is your car in a safe condition to drive long distances? Is it suitable for the terrain?

- Do you have enough confidence and experience to drive long distances and on unsealed roads?

- How will you get around the community?

- Are there public transport services? What hours do they operate? Do they go where you need to go?

- How will you get to your workplace?

- Do you know if a taxi service is available? What is the phone number?

- Are you better off taking your own transport (car, bike etc)?

Arrival

- Do you need to notify your workplace of your flight/bus/train times?

- Have you organised to be picked up on arrival?

- Do you know how/where to pick up your accommodation keys?

Accommodation

- Do you know where you are staying and the contact details?

- Does your accommodation provide cooking facilities, laundry, fridge, beds, linen, pillows, TV, microwave, crockery and cookware?
Uniform/clothes
- What is your uniform or dress code?
- What clothing will you require in your spare time? i.e. consider the weather, activities, special/ community events etc?
- Are your clothes culturally appropriate?

Meals
- Are meals provided?
- Have you advised of any dietary requirements (vegetarian, allergies etc) if meals are provided?
- Do you have cooking facilities in your accommodation?
- What shopping facilities are available?

Contact details
- Have you filled in your contact details in this guide?
- Do you have contact details for your workplace, accommodation, university placement supervisor, friends and family etc?

Community
- Have you researched the community (geography, demographics, activities, attractions, churches etc)?
- Have you planned some recreational activities for your spare time?
Rural Health Workforce Australia

Rural Health Workforce Australia is the national peak body for the seven state and territory Rural Workforce Agencies. Its not-for-profit Network is dedicated to making primary health care more accessible by attracting, recruiting and supporting health professionals needed in rural and remote communities. RHWA is also committed to the future workforce through its support of the National Rural Health Student Network.

RHWA is funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Health, to whom it provides policy and program advice.

RHWA (peak body)
www.rhwa.org.au
03 9860 4700

NSW Rural Doctors Network
www.nswrdn.com.au
02 4924 8000

RWAV (Victoria)
www.rwav.com.au
03 9349 7800

Health Workforce Queensland
www.healthworkforce.com.au
07 3105 7800

References

- www.health.gov.au
- www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au
- www.cucrh.uwa.edu.au
- www.ruralhealth.utas.edu.au
- www.drh.med.usyd.edu.au
- www.ruralhealth.unimelb.edu.au
- www.unisa.edu.au (Spencer Gulf Rural Health School)

Copies of this publication can be downloaded from www.nrhsn.org.au