



UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE

DEPARTMENT
OF RURAL
HEALTH

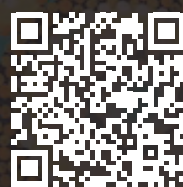
YEAR IN REVIEW 2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, work, learn and meet. We extend that respect to the wisdom of all Elders, past and present. We thank First Nations peoples for their continuous connection and care for Country and the land, sky and waterways across the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health footprint. The Department has a presence on the lands of the Anaiwan, Gumbaynggirr, Kamilaroi, Birpai, Biripi and Awabakal Nations.

We strive so that the work we do together every day helps to close the gap in health access and health education opportunities for First Nations peoples everywhere.



Josie Rose, a proud Gumbaynggirr artist with strong connections across our footprint, was commissioned to create a visual interpretation of the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health's work. The elements and wildflowers represent the locations and landscapes across our region.

Scan the QR code to view the full artwork & artist statement or visit our website newcastle.edu.au/drh/wildflowers

CONTENTS

4	About the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health
5	2025 at a glance
6	Department of Rural Health Strategic Priorities
7	A message from the Director
8	Rural Placements
10	Medicine
12	Allied Health
16	Nursing, Aged Care & Mental Health
18	North West NSW Regional Training Hub
20	Interprofessional Learning
24	Cultural Safety projects and initiatives
26	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in action
28	Research
30	Looking ahead

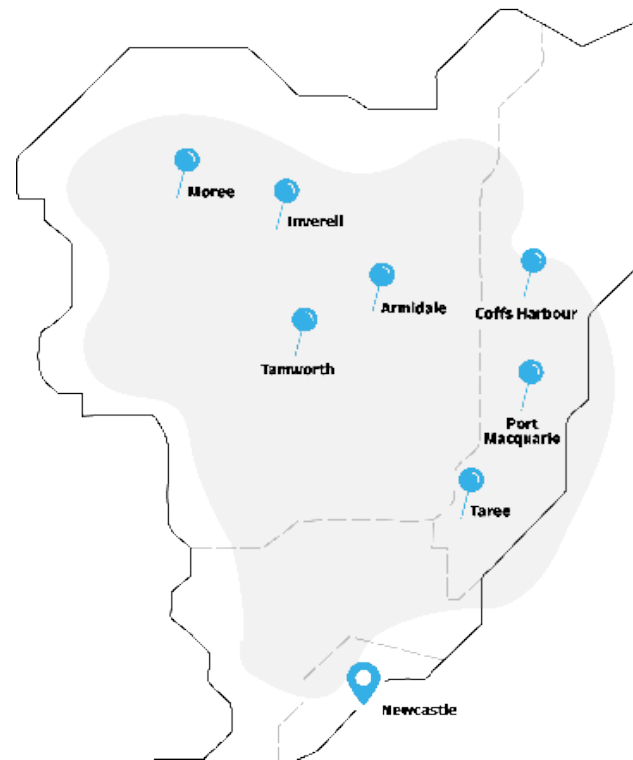
ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE **DEPARTMENT OF RURAL HEALTH**

Our students, researchers, educators and graduates are helping to improve rural and remote health and invest in our local NSW communities.

We're dedicated to enhancing the health and wellbeing of regional, rural, and First Nations communities through rural placements and educational opportunities with a focus on a variety of health disciplines, including Medicine (through our Joint Medical Program in partnership with the University of New England), Nursing, Nutrition and Dietetics, Physiotherapy, Medical Radiation Science, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy and Speech Pathology. We aim to equip the next generation of healthcare practitioners with the skills and experiences necessary to address the unique challenges faced by rural populations.

Our extensive footprint covers approximately 20 per cent of New South Wales, with education hubs strategically located in **Tamworth, Moree, Inverell, Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Taree**. Students have access to state-of-the-art teaching and placement facilities and subsidised student accommodation to ensure a supportive quality learning experience.

To learn more about our footprint visit newcastle.edu.au/drh/about-us



**75
employees**

**Our footprint
covers 20% of
NSW**

2025 AT A GLANCE

6536

Multidisciplinary
placement weeks

1232

Total number of
student placements

885

Students supported
in subsidised
accommodation

60

Year-long Rural
Immersion Program
allied health students

580

Student attendances
at interprofessional
learning sessions

68%

Joint Medical Program
students did at least
one year on rural
clinical placement

37

Research
publications

30

Academic conference
presentations

5

Research grants
awarded

19

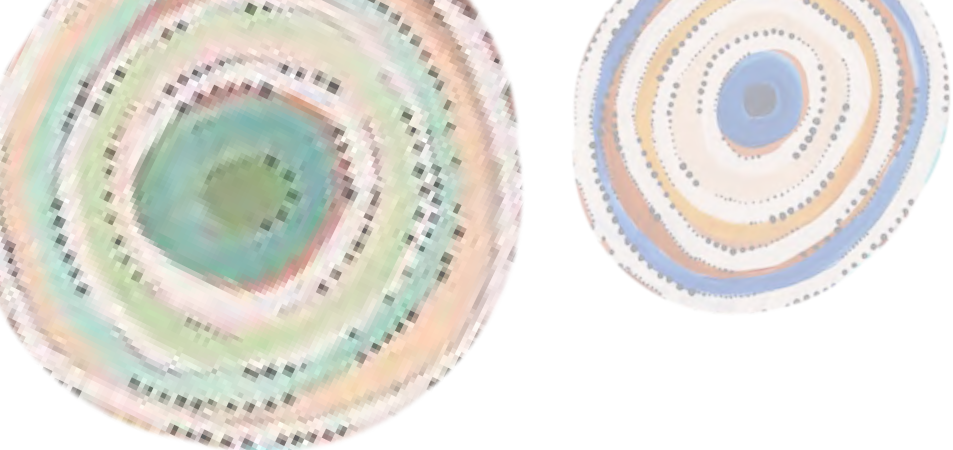
HDR students
supervised by our
academics

600

High school students
attended health
careers events

1588

Rural health professionals
upskilled through continuing
professional development



DEPARTMENT OF RURAL HEALTH

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

QUALITY RURAL IMMERSION

Our objectives are to offer placements that provide high-quality, multidisciplinary, and interprofessional learning experiences; enhance supervision capacity to expand rural placement opportunities; ensure access to rural placement opportunities for students; and support students of rural origin to engage in and benefit from rural health education and training.

RICH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Our goals are to achieve strong community recognition and a unified voice in rural health; be the preferred partner and leader in rural health education and research; create culturally safe environments with increased representation of First Nations and Torres Strait Islander people; build a resilient workforce focused on both research and education; and foster active engagement and collaborative relationships with local community stakeholders and partners.

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING & TRAINING

We aim to deliver exceptional programs to strengthen the rural health workforce; develop initiatives that enhance understanding and address the challenges of rural healthcare; and promote a culture of collegiality and academic excellence among staff and students.

ENHANCED RESEARCH PERFORMANCE AND CAPACITY

Our focus is on conducting co-designed research that is translated for impact; addressing complex challenges in rural communities; building a thriving research community with a commitment to capacity and capability development; and establishing research support structures that meet the specific needs of rural health research.

STRONG GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURES

We are committed to maintaining a governance structure that enables research, education, leadership, and strategic operations; ensuring programs equitably prioritise rural health education and research; and actively engaging local community stakeholders while fostering ongoing relationships with partners.

A MESSAGE

FROM THE DIRECTOR

At the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health, our staff, students, and partners work every day to strengthen the rural health workforce and improve access to care across regional communities. Our achievements are made possible through the dedication of clinicians, educators, and health service partners who generously share their expertise, and the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program (RHMT) funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

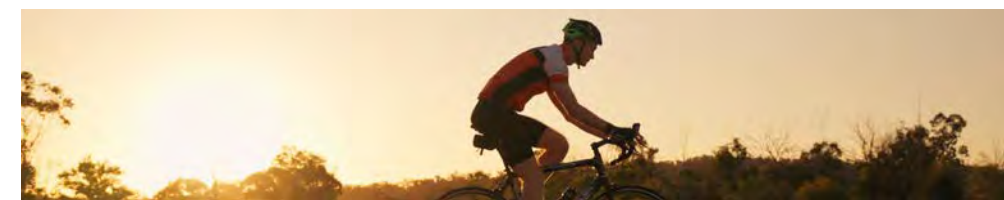
In 2025, our focus remains on people — students gaining meaningful, hands-on experience in medicine, allied health, nursing and midwifery; clinicians and local health practitioners building their skills close to home; and rural communities benefiting from our continued presence and engagement — all made possible by the dedication of our staff. Across towns and hospitals, health services and outreach programs, our teams have worked alongside local partners and community to deliver high-quality education, support, and care, building the confidence and capability of the next generation of rural health professionals. The impact of these efforts is seen in the students who choose rural careers, the clinicians who feel supported in their professional growth, and the communities who gain better access to high quality health care.

Looking ahead, we are excited to celebrate 25 years of rural health education, with 2026 marking the 25th anniversary of the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health. This milestone is a celebration of the generations of staff, students, and community partners who have contributed to building strong, resilient, and vibrant rural health care across NSW.

This review captures and celebrates the achievements, stories, and enduring impact of our people, and the difference they make in regional communities every day.



LEANNE BROWN
Director
University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health



RURAL PLACEMENTS

The University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health delivers rural student placements through a three-stream model designed to meet students at different stages of their training and exposure to rural practice.

The **Immerse** stream supports long-term placements, including Rural Study in Place experiences. This program offers students the opportunity to live, learn and train within a rural community across the academic year. The **Engage** stream offers tailored rural placements of shorter duration that integrate rural exposure and the opportunity to engage with the rural community, combined with their placement. The **Discover** stream provides short-term placement opportunities (often in the form of one-off placements), that are designed to encourage students to 'discover' rural health practice and community life.

Across all streams, in 2025 students undertook placements in communities throughout rural NSW, gaining hands-on clinical experience within supportive learning environments. Working in smaller clinical teams enabled personalised supervision, increased patient access, and meaningful interprofessional learning. Students were provided with opportunities to engage in Professional Experiences in Rural Communities (PERCs) and networking with local clinicians to enrich the placement experience, strengthening students' understanding of rural health practice and contributing to the development of a skilled, connected and future-focused rural health workforce.

"I feel incredibly fortunate to have had so many memorable experiences in Moree that have given me great perspective on the **strength, lifestyle, and health of rural communities.**"

Alex
Nutrition & Dietetics student





37 **46** **22** **105**

Students at Manning Clinical School, Taree

Students at Peel Clinical School, Tamworth

Students at Tablelands Clinical School, Armidale

Full-year rural Medicine placements

This year, 105 medical students spent a full year completing Year 4 or Year 5 of their Joint Medical Program (JMP) at the Manning Rural Clinical School in Taree, the Peel Rural Clinical School in Tamworth, or the Tablelands Rural Clinical School in Armidale. These extended rural study options provide students with valuable hands-on experience in rural healthcare settings, where they continue their study while they work closely alongside experienced doctors, health professionals and multidisciplinary teams.

Through this immersive learning model, students gain exposure to a wide range of clinical presentations while developing the practical skills, confidence and adaptability required for rural medical practice. Just as importantly, living and learning in rural communities allows students to build meaningful connections with patients, colleagues and the towns they serve, deepening their understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges of rural healthcare.

Students from Manning Rural Clinical School also participated in the Assistant in Medicine (AiMs) program at Manning Hospital, exercising practical hands-on skills. The AiMs program is set to be expanded to Tamworth Hospital in addition to Manning in 2026.

We are proud to see so many of our graduates return to Tamworth, Manning and Armidale hospitals as interns, continuing their training within our rural footprint and contributing to the future rural medical workforce.

“When you compare it to urban locations, you are essentially the only student on a team and the exposure you get as a student is second to none.”

Lauren
Year 5 Medical Student, Tamworth

DAVID PARSONS | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Medical Science & Doctor of Medicine

Manning Clinical School, Taree

David Parsons is a proud Worimi Biripi man from Newcastle and a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Medical Science and Doctor of Medicine at the University of Newcastle, completing his studies at the 2025 graduation ceremonies. After training across multiple campuses, he chose to undertake his clinical placement at the Manning Clinical School in Taree, drawn by its strong teaching, supportive culture and hands-on learning opportunities. Remaining in Taree for an additional year through an extended pathway, David valued the one-on-one teaching, close-knit cohort and increased clinical exposure that rural placements provide. Reflecting on his experience, he credits the rural clinical school with accelerating his development as a clinician, sharing, “I wouldn’t be as confident or as far along in my medical training if I hadn’t come to a rural clinical school.”



Following graduation, David was involved in a serious motor vehicle accident and is recovering. He is making encouraging progress, supported by the care, compassion and community that underpins rural health. He recently returned to share his story with students at Critical Care Week 2026, offering a powerful reflection on resilience, trauma care and the patient journey.

RURAL RESEARCH | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Medical Science & Doctor of Medicine

Peel Clinical School, Tamworth

Year 5 medical students Miren Davies, Caitlin Mulveney, and Briony Littlejohns were awarded first place in the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand 3 Minute + 1 Question (3M1Q) National Competition for their MD research project, Beyond City Limits: Are EDs Bridging the Gap for Rural Colorectal Cancer Care?.

The project was undertaken during their placement at the Peel Rural Clinical School in Tamworth in 2024 and explored disparities in emergency department presentation and service access for rural cancer patients compared to those in major cities. Caitlin represented the team at the national finals, delivering a standout presentation. The achievement reflects two years of sustained research effort, supported by Dr Julie Depczynski and Dr Julie Burrows, and highlights the strength of research within the Joint Medical Program.





ALLIED HEALTH

710 Rural student placements in 2025

4271 Placement weeks

8 Disciplines supported

7 Rural training sites

Across 2025, the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health supported more than 700 allied health student placements, collectively delivering over 4,200 placement weeks across rural and regional communities throughout our footprint. These placements included a mix of short-term placements and year-long immersion opportunities, providing students with meaningful exposure to rural health practice while supporting local health services. Students from disciplines including Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Nutrition and Dietetics, Medical Radiation Science, Speech Pathology and Pharmacy undertook placements across Tamworth, Armidale, Inverell, Moree, Taree, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and surrounding communities.

Students gained experience across a diverse range of healthcare environments, including public and private hospitals, community health services, disability and rehabilitation services, aged care facilities, private practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. Working alongside multidisciplinary teams, students were able to apply their academic learning in real-world settings while contributing to service delivery in communities where allied health professionals are essential to improving health outcomes.



NUTRITION AND DIETETICS RURAL IMMERSION

Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics students were featured in Camden Haven News for their work with Hastings Neighbourhood Services in Lake Cathie. Through the Grow, Catch and Cook and Food Connect initiatives, students applied their nutrition knowledge to support community food sustainability and rescue, while gaining practical experience. Associate Lecturer Laura Van Bussel emphasised how these placements allow students to make meaningful contributions to the communities they learn from.

Beyond their clinical placements, many students participated in Professional Experiences in Rural Communities (PERCs), including interprofessional learning activities and health promotion initiatives. These experiences build important skills in teamwork, communication and culturally responsive care.

Through PERCs, students developed practical clinical capability, strengthened their cultural awareness, and formed meaningful connections with the communities they served. Together, these placements help strengthen the rural health workforce pipeline and support the future of healthcare in rural communities.

BRYAN ALCID | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Pharmacy

Taree

Hands-on rural placements prepare students for practice while strengthening connections to rural health communities. In 2025, Pharmacy student Bryan Alcid completed a placement in Taree, where community engagement, close supervision and real-world challenges shaped his learning.

During the 2025 floods, he witnessed strong collaboration between pharmacists, doctors and NSW SES to maintain access to essential medications, building his clinical skills and understanding of community care. Bryan's efforts were recognised with the 2025 Student Career-ready Placement Award at the Employability Excellence Awards, highlighting the value of rural placements in developing confident, community-focused health professionals.



REAL-WORLD OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy

Tamworth

As part of their rural placement, third-year Occupational Therapy students visited a cotton farm near Breeza, outside Tamworth, to explore how adaptive equipment supports farmers with spinal cord injuries to remain active on the land. Students observed innovative solutions in action, including modified tractor access, hand controls, track wheelchairs and custom-built ramps. The experience highlighted the creativity and real-world impact of occupational therapy in rural communities, sparking many "we never thought of that" moments.



YARN UP & COOK UP

Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics

Armidale

Yarn Up & Cook Up is a six-week program delivered in partnership with Armidale Secondary College, bringing together 16 First Nations students with Nutrition and Dietetics students and staff from the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health. Through hands-on cooking sessions and student-led nutrition topics, the program created a culturally safe space for learning, skill-building and connection. Participants shared stories, developed practical food skills and explored nutrition in meaningful ways, with a highlight being the co-design of the Yarn Up & Cook Up logo reflecting the group's shared identity and experience.



HANNAH & GRACE | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Medical Radiation Science

Port Macquarie

Port Macquarie Radiation Therapy students Hannah and Grace presented at the Mid North Coast Imaging and Therapy Conference, joining more than 60 Medical Radiation Science professionals from across the region. The experience allowed them to showcase their learning, engage in professional dialogue and contribute to conversations shaping contemporary practice. Their involvement reflects the growing leadership and confidence of rural-based students within medical radiation science.



PREPARATION FOR PLACEMENT

Bachelor of Physiotherapy

Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, Taree & Tamworth

Throughout the year, second-year Physiotherapy students in Taree, Port Macquarie, Tamworth and Coffs Harbour built readiness for rural placement through Preparation for Placement Week. Using hands-on simulated cases, students strengthened clinical reasoning, communication and confidence, practising decision-making and reflection in a supportive learning environment. The experience supported a smoother transition into placement and reinforced the value of learning within regional communities.



“My placement gave me experience across a community playgroup, private practice and a small public school, showing how speech pathology supports families across the whole community.”

Chelsea
Speech Pathology student

NURSING, AGED CARE & MENTAL HEALTH

253

Nursing placements in Tamworth

72%

of Rural Immersion students employed rurally

11

Rural Immersion Nursing students

117

weeks of aged care placements

Nursing, aged care and mental health remain central to the Department of Rural Health's mission to strengthen the rural workforce through immersive placements, interprofessional education and strong local partnerships.

In 2025, the Nursing Rural Immersion Program in Tamworth delivered extended placements combining clinical practice, simulation and community engagement, with many graduates moving into rural roles. Partnerships with McLean Aged Care in Inverell provided multidisciplinary placements across residential, hospital and community settings, strengthening student learning and local service connections. Mental health and wellbeing also remained a focus, with staff completing Mental Health First Aid training and community education events delivered with partners such as HealthWISE across regional towns.



In 2025, we partnered with students, staff and residents at MacLean Aged Care to create a heartfelt video showcasing the aged care placement experience and the meaningful connections formed in rural communities. Designed to break down barriers for students unsure about Aged Care placements, the video offers students a genuine insight into what these placements are really like.

Scan the QR code to watch the video.

OLIVIA CLIFT | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Nursing

Tamworth

Olivia Clift, a rural 'local' from Willow Tree, used the Nursing Rural Immersion Program as a pathway to return home and reconnect with her community. She embraced every opportunity offered, from clinical experiences to community engagement, and her dedication was recognised when she was shortlisted for an Employability Excellence Award. Olivia's leadership also earned her the honour of addressing the 2025 nursing graduates at their graduation ceremony - an inspiring moment that showcased the impact of the program on both students and rural communities.



ZACK INNES | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Nursing

Tamworth

During the 2025 Rural Immersion Program in Tamworth, Nursing student Zack discovered a passion for mental health care in rural settings. Supported by experienced nurses, he strengthened his clinical skills, gained hands-on experience, and built meaningful community connections. Stories like Zack's highlight how rural placements shape confident, purpose-driven graduates ready for careers in rural health.



RUBY CAMPS | CLASS OF 2025

Bachelor of Physiotherapy

Inverell

During 2025, Physiotherapy student Ruby completed her placement in Inverell, embracing rural life while gaining valuable experience in allied health within aged care settings. Working with McLean Care, she developed her professional skills while building meaningful connections with residents and staff. Initially uncertain about working with elderly residents, Ruby described the experience as deeply rewarding, an experience she now cherishes and recommends to others seeking hands-on, impactful learning.



NORTH WEST NSW REGIONAL TRAINING HUB

Driven by the core principles 'gain, train and retain rurally', the Regional Training Hub is dedicated to ensuring a sustainable rural medical workforce that meets the needs of our communities now and in the future.

The Regional Training Hub supports the people and organisations who play a role in building a strong rural medical workforce. With a footprint spanning Armidale, Tamworth and Taree, the hub works closely with local health services in these areas to foster rural intent, build training capacity and drive practical, community driven solutions to address workforce gaps. The hub also serves as a connector; strengthening professional development and mentoring networks within the footprint.

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, the Hub is committed to supporting aspiring students and doctors at every stage, and highlighting the vibrant lifelong career possibilities of rural medicine.

BUILDING A RURAL CAREER CLOSER TO HOME

In 2025, Dr Nicole Jackson became the first Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Medical Educator for the Manning region, strengthening the local GP training pipeline. A University of Newcastle alumna, she trained at the Manning Rural Clinical School, remained in the region through internship and registrar training to Fellowship, and now as a Senior Lecturer of Medicine, she mentors the next generation of rural doctors — demonstrating how staying local builds long-term healthcare capacity in rural communities.



HIGHLIGHTS

To learn more visit newcastle.edu.au/drh/regional-training-hub

2025 was a year of growth, collaboration and innovation for the Regional Training Hub, marked by several significant achievements across education, training and workforce development

- We proudly launched the Manning Clinical Society, strengthening professional connections between clinicians and students across the region.
- Our team contributed to national discussions on rural training and workforce at the Medical Student Rural Inspiration Conference and the Regional Training Hub National Forum.
- We supported GP professional development locally and nationally through delivery of the Certificate in Clinical Teaching and Supervision.
- Six Year 5 Joint Medical Program (JMP) students from the Manning, Peel and Tablelands Rural Clinical Schools attended the RMA25 Conference in Perth, strengthening exposure to rural career pathways.
- Training opportunities expanded with the introduction of the newly named Australian Primary Care Prevention Program (APCPP) PGY2 term in Manilla, complementing existing terms in Gloucester, Scone and Moree.
- JMO-led teaching continued to thrive in Taree and Tamworth, focusing on critical care topics such as pain management, blood pressure concerns, allergic reactions and seizures.
- In partnership with Manning Hospital, the North West NSW Regional Training Hub hosted a JMO and Medicine Networking and Appreciation Event in Taree, celebrating collaboration and strengthening professional relationships.

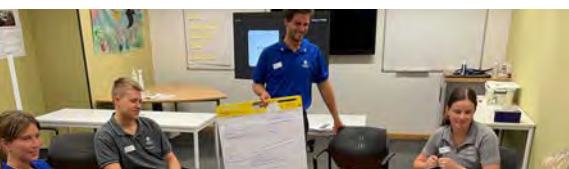
INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Preparing our future health workforce for collaborative practice.

Providing a learning environment where students from multiple disciplines come together to learn with, from and about each other in a supportive and engaging setting underpins all of our programs. Across our footprint, interprofessional learning occurs in both formal and informal settings.

In 2025, 25 formal Interprofessional Learning Modules (ILMs) were delivered, engaging 580 students across our rural sites. These modules are designed to strengthen collaboration, communication and teamwork skills among future healthcare professionals working in rural and regional settings.

ILM sessions explored a wide range of topics and learning formats, from interactive case discussions and ethical dilemmas to creative problem-solving activities such as health-focused escape rooms, interprofessional quizzes and patient perspective sessions. Many modules also incorporated lived experience and real-world clinical scenarios, helping students better understand the roles of different health professions and the importance of collaborative care in improving patient outcomes.



UNDERSTANDING PARKINSON'S THROUGH COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Tamworth

As part of the interprofessional learning module in Tamworth, students worked alongside members of the local Parkinson's group to gain insight into the lived experience of Parkinson's disease. Guided by clinical input from a movement disorder nurse, students explored how the condition impacts daily life, identity and community. The session concluded with a collaborative mini-hackathon, where students developed ideas to increase awareness and support for Parkinson's in rural communities, reinforcing the value of learning from community voices and working across health disciplines.



INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ACTION

Port Macquarie

Interprofessional learning activities in Port Macquarie brought together 25 health students from multiple disciplines for the first module of the year. Through an interactive Escape Room challenge, students worked collaboratively to solve problems and unlock clues, strengthening their communication, teamwork and clinical reasoning skills. The activity encouraged students to learn alongside peers from other health disciplines, building a deeper understanding of each other's roles and reinforcing the importance of collaborative practice in delivering high-quality patient care.



LEARNING TOGETHER IN RURAL PRACTICE

Armidale

Students from Nursing, Nutrition and Dietetics, Speech Pathology and Physiotherapy placements in Armidale came together for an interprofessional learning module focused on collaboration and real-world problem solving. Working across disciplines, students tackled shared scenarios, building communication skills, teamwork and confidence while learning from each other's perspectives. The experience highlighted the value of interprofessional learning in preparing students for collaborative practice in rural healthcare settings.



**"Across our footprint
we strive to create
conditions that support
connection to and
engagement with First
Nations communities
and culture, with a
view to enhancing
opportunities to share,
learn and collaborate
together."**

**Leanne Brown
Director**



Pictured: On-Country smoking ceremony,
Gumbaynggirr Nation in Coffs Harbour.

CULTURAL SAFETY PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

We champion cultural safety across our Department through initiatives that promote respect, inclusion and deep listening in all aspects of our work. By walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we deliver culturally informed projects, resources and training that support culturally safe teaching spaces, student placements and engagement across our footprint, while strengthening relationships with the communities we serve.

To learn more visit newcastle.edu.au/drh/cultural-safety

CULTURAL CAPABILITY TRAINING

By the end of 2025, 73 per cent of our staff had completed the University of Newcastle Cultural Capability Training. Ongoing learning is supported through On-Country experiences, cultural events and education, with 42 staff participating in On-Country learning and 55 completing training in 2025 — reinforcing our commitment to culturally safe and responsive practice.

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH STUDENTS VISIT OUR FOOTPRINT

Working along side the University of Newcastle, we hosted Papua New Guinea Graduate Certificate in Nutrition fellows for a community-led program in leadership, advocacy and cultural exchange, including a Welcome to Country, cultural learning, and engagement with local health professionals. Funded by Australia Awards and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the program strengthened leadership, cross-cultural partnerships, and connections with the university.

KOORI KNOCKOUT

Tamworth hosted the 2025 NSW Koori Knockout, one of Australia's largest First Nations gatherings celebrating rugby league, culture and community. Our staff and students supported teams with health education, preparation and player care, gaining hands-on experience in event-based healthcare and the connection between culture, sport and health.



embark

CULTURAL SAFETY TRAINING PROGRAM

In 2025, the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health expanded its cultural training initiatives through the launch of embark — a cultural safety program designed to support students undertaking rural placements across our footprint. Developed in close partnership with local First Nations communities and the University of Newcastle's cultural teams, embark is grounded in respectful collaboration, ensuring content, delivery and engagement are culturally safe, locally informed and meaningful.

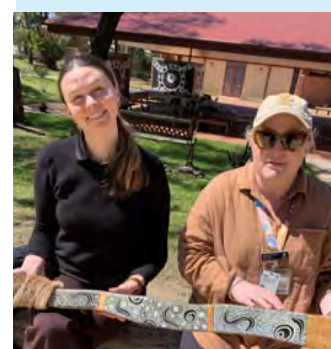
The program was delivered across seven sites: Inverell, Moree, Armidale, Taree, Tamworth, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour—bringing together online learning, face-to-face workshops and locally delivered On-Country experiences. All seven sites held dedicated full-day On-Country sessions with students and staff, strengthening shared learning and connection to place. Through embark, students deepen their understanding of First Nations culture, history, health and enduring connections to Country, while building the skills, confidence and awareness needed to provide culturally safe healthcare in rural communities. embark represents a significant step in embedding cultural safety across rural placements, with each On-Country experience uniquely shaped by local Elders, knowledge holders and community leaders to reflect the distinct cultural contexts of each community.

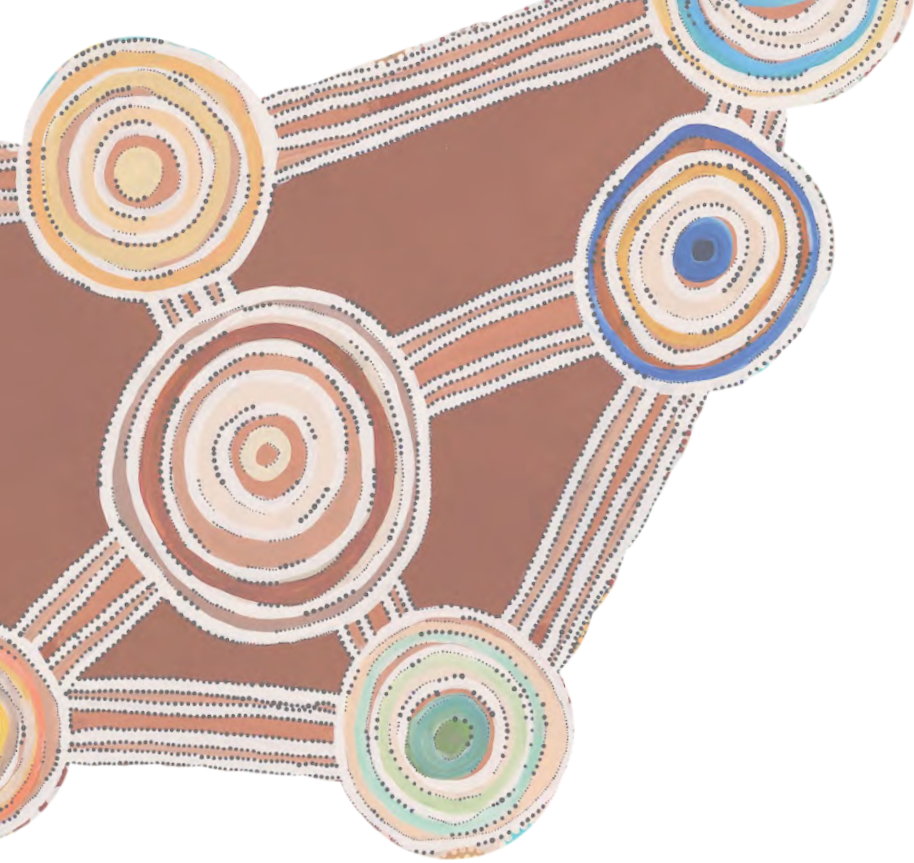
122

**students
attended On-
Country across
the footprint**

55

**staff completed
their cultural
capability staff
training**

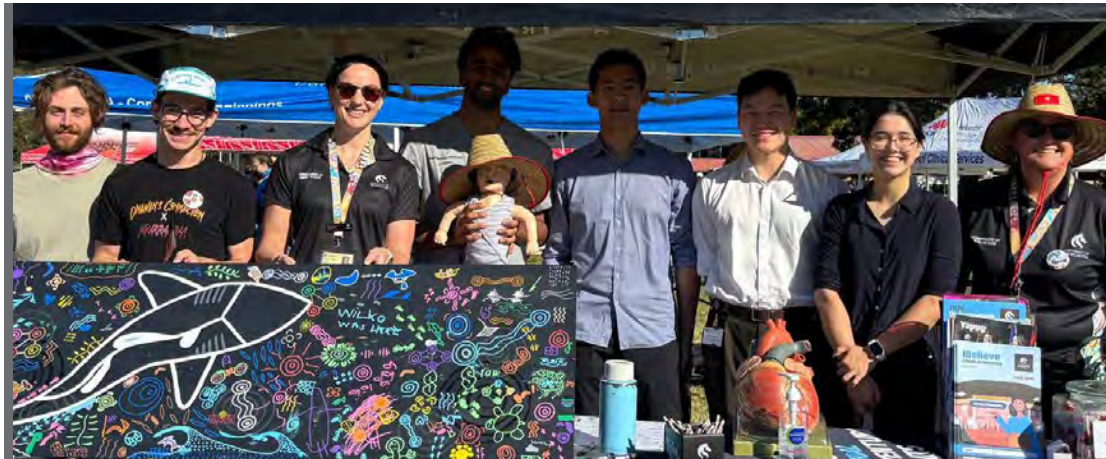




EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION **IN ACTION**

We're committed to ensuring our staff and students feel equipped to thrive in the diverse communities that make up our footprint and have the opportunity to actively celebrate diversity and inclusion.

To learn more visit newcastle.edu.au/drh/edic





RESEARCH

37

research publications

30

conference presentations

19

HDR students supervised

5

research grants awarded

In 2025, our research delivered meaningful insights to improve rural health outcomes, enrich student experiences and strengthen the rural workforce. Research training and supervision remained a key focus, supporting a growing pipeline of emerging researchers across Higher Degree by Research, Honours and MD programs.

Across the year, our team published 37 peer-reviewed journal articles (68% in top-quartile journals) and delivered 30 conference presentations, reflecting strong contributions to national and international rural health research. Many publications were led by Department academics, with 38% generated through student research—highlighting our integrated approach to research, education and workforce development.

The Department supported 19 HDR students (16 PhD, 3 Masters), with research spanning key rural priorities including health service delivery, workforce development, community wellbeing and innovative education. Continued investment in training, mentoring and partnerships strengthened rural research capacity and supports a sustainable future workforce.

MAP MY PROJECT

MapMy is a research collaboration with Deakin University focused on developing an app to better understand local food environments and the dietary risks facing people living in rural and remote Australia.

The project explores how digital tools can help identify barriers to healthy food access and support improved nutrition outcomes in rural communities. It also created valuable opportunities for research staff at our smaller rural sites, with Chloe Parkins (Manilla) and Penny Hands (Barraba) developing their skills in community engagement and study recruitment while contributing to the project.



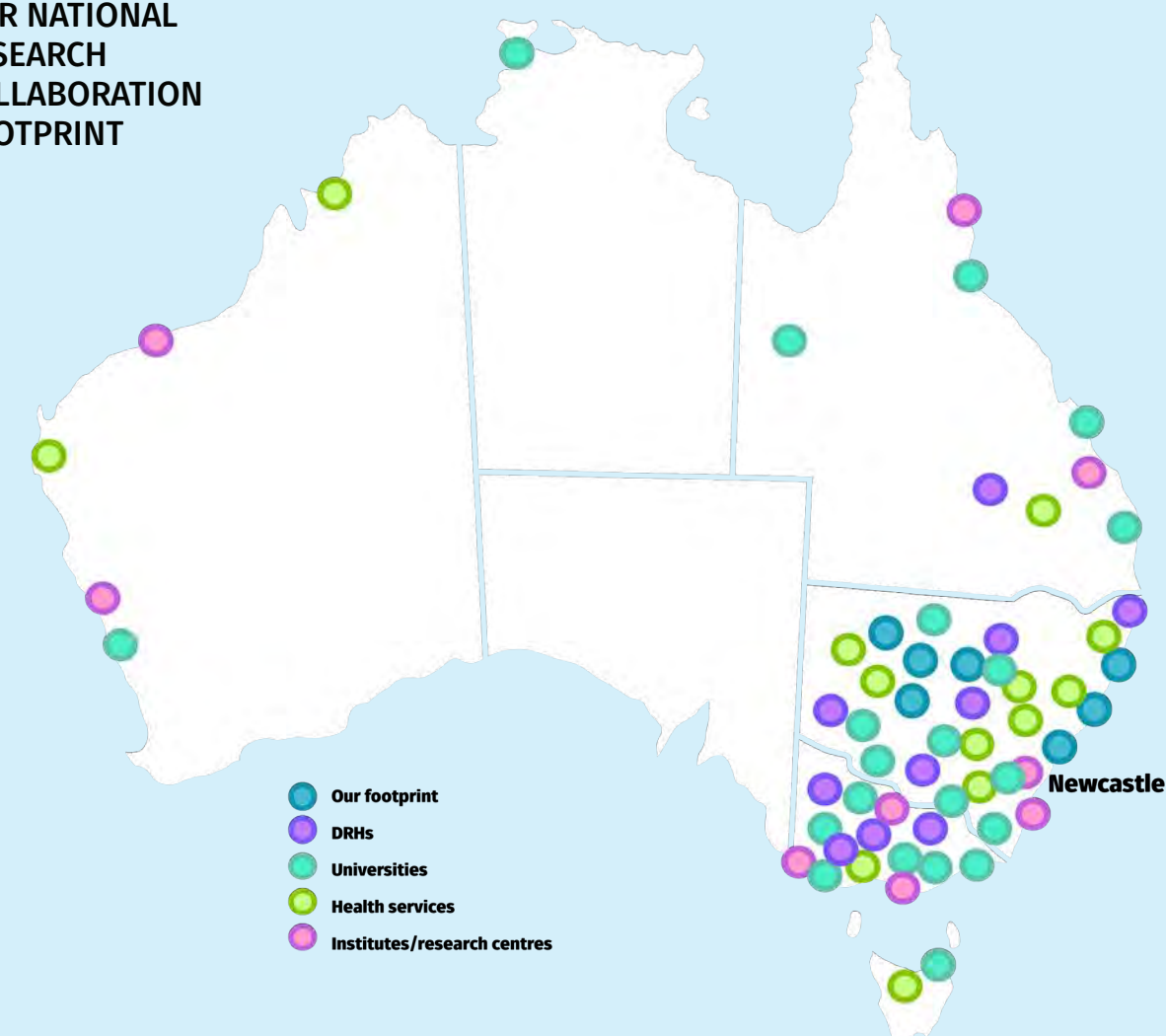
ROLE-MODELLING INTERPROFESSIONAL RAPPORT

Funded by the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) in 2023, the Rapport Between Clinical Educators from Different Professions project strengthened clinical educators' ability to model interprofessional collaboration. Delivered across Port Macquarie, Taree and Tamworth, workshops brought together multidisciplinary educators to explore how rapport influences teamwork, supervision and patient care, building confidence to support diverse students and foster collaborative practice.

MAPPING AUSTRALIA'S RURAL PHD WORKFORCE

In 2025, our researchers contributed to a national study highlighting gaps in rural research capacity. While 28% of Australians live rurally, only 15% of the PhD workforce is based outside metropolitan areas. The study identifies challenges including an ageing workforce, limited secure roles and constrained career pathways, with findings (due 2026) set to inform investment in a sustainable rural research workforce.

OUR NATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION FOOTPRINT



Our Publications

Scan the QR code to view the list of our 2025 publications and research outcomes or visit our website newcastle.edu.au/drh/research



LOOKING AHEAD

25 years of place, people and purpose —
and the future we're building together.

In 2026, the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health will mark a significant milestone: 25 years of a sustained commitment to rural health, education and community partnership from our beginnings in Tamworth, NSW.

This anniversary will be a year of reflection and celebration, as we look back through our archives to honour the people, students and communities who have shaped our journey. It will be a time to acknowledge the impact of those who laid the foundations, and the generations of learners and clinicians who have contributed to strengthening rural health outcomes across our regions.

Importantly, 2026 will also be a year of learning and looking forward. As we celebrate the past, we will lean into conversations about the future of rural health - exploring what lies ahead for rural communities, education and workforce development beyond 2026. Guided by our history and grounded in community, this milestone year will reaffirm our purpose while helping shape the next chapter of rural health education and practice.



**DEPARTMENT
OF RURAL
HEALTH**

**TRAINING
RURAL
HEALTH
STUDENTS
ACROSS
NSW**