

# HNELHD

## Rural and Regional Health Services

### Research Plan

#### 2020-2022



**Health**  
Hunter New England  
Local Health District

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**We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians and owners of the land, the Kamilaroi people where we meet and work together towards better health outcomes for our communities**



# A message from our Executive Director

We are excited to support the growth of research and research translation within R&RHS and recognise this as an **important step towards understanding and improving the health outcomes of our unique communities.**

Our plan is guided by the *HNELHD Research and Research Translation Plan 2018-2021* and aligns with NSW health priorities. It specifically seeks to support existing research within our footprint, expand engagement with research and strengthen collaboration with industry partners.

Objectives within the plan demonstrate our commitment and encouragement for our workforce to be curious, innovative and resourceful and ultimately to develop and translate research findings that deliver high quality care. Our plan values genuine community engagement to ensure relevant research directions and cultural safety.



We look forward to forming the HNE Rural Research Committee to provide us with research leadership and advocacy and to ensure research continues to be embedded into our systems, policies and procedures.

Please take the time to familiarise yourself with this plan and consider how it may benefit in building research capacity within your speciality. I look forward to watching research within R&RHS continue to grow and our communities benefiting.

**Susan Heyman**



# RURAL & REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

## ABOUT US .....

HNELHD is the only district in New South Wales made up of:



- A major metropolitan centre
- A mix of several large regional centers
- Many smaller rural centres and remote communities within its borders



## R&RHS .....

Consists of:  
2 Rural Referral Hospitals  
10 Community Hospitals  
12 Multi-Purpose Services (MPS)  
and  
56 Community Health Services.

## WHEN COMPARED TO METROPOLITAN AREAS.....

## OUR COMMUNITIES

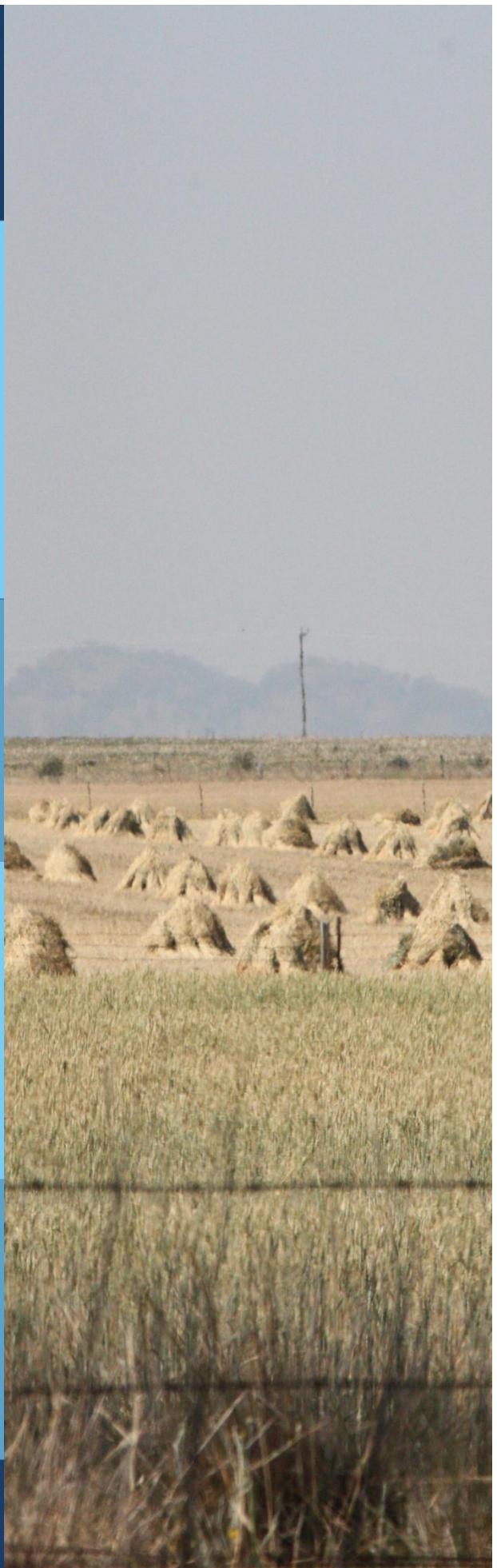
Experience difficulty accessing health services, travel greater distances to seek treatment, increased unemployment and less education opportunities (AIHW 2018).



## ..... OUR HEALTH

Higher rates of mortality, poorer health outcomes and obesity. Increased rates of risky behaviours such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and reduced physical activity (AIHW 2018).

**29%** of Australians live in a rural area which is around 7 million people (AIHW 2018)



# Introduction

**Global** trends to improve health care systems have seen increased investment in health research that directly translates evidence based knowledge into practice<sup>1; 2</sup>. Echoing this are **national** and **NSW Health** priorities to improve innovation and collaboration between researchers, clinicians and consumers and to develop research that prioritises the unmet health needs of our population<sup>3; 4</sup>.

**HNELHD** has responded to these priorities and is currently implementing the *Research and Research Translation Plan 2018/2020* resulting in steady growth of research and research translation throughout the district.

Compared to patients in major city hospitals, patients from regional and remote hospitals were more likely to say they definitely felt more involved in decisions about their care (AIHW 2018).



Fig 1 R&RHS Sectors include: Mehi, Tablelands, Peel and Hunter Valley

Traditionally there is less engagement with research in the rural setting and **R&RHS** has developed a specialised plan to address this.

R&RHS is made up of four rural sectors within HNELHD including; Mehi, Peel, Tablelands and Hunter Valley (fig 1) and communities within this footprint are home to some of the most vulnerable population groups in Australia<sup>5</sup>.

When compared to their metropolitan counterparts rural communities experience poorer health outcomes and significant challenges in recruiting and retaining a health workforce<sup>6</sup>

More research focused on rural health needs will enhance our understanding of these unique challenges, inform service delivery and improve health outcomes.

# Our Plan

## HNELHD Vision

The health and wellbeing of HNELHD patients and community is enhanced through the conduct of health and medical research and the translation of research evidence into high quality and effective health service delivery

## Aims

The plan aims to strengthen R&RHS systems and processes to enable the generation and translation of high quality research that addresses the specific needs of our rural communities.

R&RHS Research Plan seeks to align to priorities within the following plans:

- R&RHS Operational Plan
- HNELHD Research and Research Translation Plan 2018/2021
- HNELHD Looking forward to 2021
- NSW Rural Health Plan 2021<sup>7</sup>

## Values

### **C**ollaboration

- Multidisciplinary research where possible and strong partnerships with consumers, universities, research institutes, organisations and community groups

### **O**penness

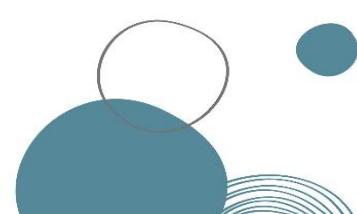
- Genuine engagement with our consumers and promotion of our research achievements within communities

### **R**espect

- Cultural safety and highest ethical standards maintained

### **E**mpowerment

- Research that Advocates for our vulnerable population groups and the opportunity for staff to play an important role in continually improving the care we provide.



## **Goals:**

Key directions of the plan have been informed by the *HNELHD Research and Research Translation Plan 2018/2021*, through broad consultation with R&RHS staff and consideration of current literature relating to building rural research capacity.

Four goals have been targeted from the *HNELHD Research and Research Translation Plan 2018/2021* and will be implemented over the next two years. The goals have been summarised below:

### **1. Enhance research capability**

Strategies that aim to enhance the organisational approach to research such as; the development of a specialised rural research committee, formalising arrangements with key external partners and exploring opportunities for broadening research accountabilities and roles within R&RHS.

### **2. Enhance research support**

Initiatives to support R&RHS staff to develop research skills through grants, scholarships, and other professional development opportunities. A focus on encouraging Aboriginal health research by working alongside the HNELHD Aboriginal Health Unit and local Aboriginal communities. Development of a communication strategy will be to promote R&RHS research opportunities and success.

### **3. Enhance the conduct of clinical trials**

This goal aims to advocate and improve access for R&RHS communities to increase participation in clinical trials. Accessing new medications, medical devices and treatments is often dependent on the opportunity to participate in a trial and for rural populations there are many barriers<sup>8</sup>. (Australian Government recently announced \$100 million towards improving access to clinical trials in rural areas<sup>8</sup>).

### **4. Enhance community engagement**

Strategies within this goal are focused on the development and participation in initiatives to improve awareness of community engagement. Actively involving consumers in the research process is recognised as having many benefits including enhanced accountability, relevance of the research topic as well as improved translation of findings into practice<sup>9</sup>.



Goal 1 Enhance R&RHS research capability				
Actions	Actions	Responsibility	Outcomes	Date
<b>1.1 Develop a R&amp;RHS Research Committee</b>	-Determine function, membership and scope of the HNE Rural Research committee (HNE Rural RC).	R&RHS Exec R&RHS Research Coordinator	Research committee formed and Term of Reference developed. Research leadership enhanced	March 2020
<b>1.2 Identify and develop key research directions for R&amp;RHS</b>	-Align research priorities with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HNELHD Research and Research Translation Plan 2018-2021</li><li>• R&amp;RHS Operational Plan</li><li>• HNELHD Looking forward to 2021</li><li>• NSW Rural Health Plan 2021</li></ul> -Undertake broad scale consultation with R&RHS staff about current research activity	HNE Rural RC R&RHS Research Coordinator HNE Research office	Relevant research for our communities Improved collaboration and research translation	April 2020  Ongoing
<b>1.3 Map current and potential R&amp;RHS research activity</b>	-Form a R&RHS research register  -Deliver an annual report of R&RHS research activity and highlight impacts	R&RHS Research Coordinator	Successful research models identified and promoted  Improved collaboration and research translation	April 2020  December 2020
<b>1.4 Strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with key stakeholders</b>	-Connect regularly with key partners to discuss research opportunities e.g. NSW Regional Health Partners, HMRI, UON, UDRH, UNE, PHN ACI, HETI other LHDs community and not-for-profit groups	HNE Rural RC R&RHS Research Coordinator HNE Research office	Improved support and collaboration	Ongoing
<b>1.5 Identify opportunities for researcher employment</b>	-Identify existing models of researcher employment within R&RHS e.g. Joint appointments, Fellowships  -Consider new opportunities and models for researcher employment and promote	R&RHS Research Coordinator R&RHS Exec HNE Research office	Agreed models promoted  Increased researcher appointments  Enhanced research leadership	March 2020  Ongoing
<b>1.6 Integrate and broaden accountability for research within R&amp;RHS</b>	-Incorporate research accountabilities in key clinical management and leadership position descriptions and selection criteria  -Integrate research accountabilities into PDRs, 90 day plans, MAMs, agendas and KPIs	R&RHS Exec HNE Research office	Improved research leadership  Shared accountability  Enhanced translation	Ongoing  Ongoing

Goal 2 Enhance R&RHS research support				
Actions	Actions	Responsibility	Outcomes	Date
<b>2.1 Promote and facilitate grant funding opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Develop promotional material e.g. research grant calendar</li> <li>-Target and encourage staff and link to grant opportunities</li> <li>-Track and promote R&amp;RHS grant success</li> </ul>	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Research office	Increased research capacity  Increased grant applications and Improved grant success	Ongoing
<b>2.2 Connect staff to practical research support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identify internal and external research resources to assist staff with grant applications, scholarship opportunities, ethics, research design, methodology, publication, and translation.</li> <li>-Develop initiatives to connect researchers with R&amp;RHS staff e.g. research drop in clinic/hub and researcher visits to services</li> </ul>	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Research office	Improved engagement with research in clinical practice  Enhanced R&RHS research network including external partners	Ongoing
<b>2.3 Encourage professional development opportunities aimed at improving research skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Complete an environmental scan of existing professional development opportunities related to research</li> <li>-Collaborate with key partners to determine priorities for research education opportunities targeted at rural clinicians</li> <li>-Increase promotion of HETI Rural Research Capacity Building Program</li> </ul>	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Rural RC  HNE Research office	Enhanced research capacity  Improved access to professional development opportunities  Increased participation in Rural Research Capacity Building Program	March 2020
<b>2.4 Support and encourage opportunities for Aboriginal Health Research within R&amp;RHS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work alongside HNE Aboriginal Health Unit to develop initiatives to enhance rural Aboriginal Health research in collaboration</li> <li>-Seek guidance from local Aboriginal groups within R&amp;RHS to ensure research is culturally safe and aligns with the needs of communities.</li> </ul>	HNE Rural RC  R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Aboriginal Health Unit	Increased Aboriginal health research capacity  Relevant Aboriginal Health research for our communities  Cultural safety maintained	Ongoing
<b>2.5 Promote R&amp;RHS research activities within HNELHD and our communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Develop a communication strategy, consider branding and social media opportunities</li> <li>-Create a rural research award</li> </ul>	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Rural RC	Communication strategy established  Improved opportunity for research engagement and philanthropic support	September 2020

Goal 3 Enhance the opportunity for clinical trials within R&RHS				
Actions	Actions	Responsibility	Outcomes	Date
<b>3.1 Ensure R&amp;RHS representation on relevant working parties related to improving opportunities for rural clinical trials</b>	-Identify relevant working parties and seek R&RHS representation	HNE Rural RC  R&RHS Research Coordinator	Improved participation in relevant clinical trials	Ongoing
<b>3.2 Support the accreditation process for clinical trials across the R&amp;RHS sectors</b>	-Provide local support during the accreditation process	HNE Research Office  R&RHS Research Coordinator	R&RHS sites accredited  Improved opportunity for clinical trials	TBC
<b>3.3 Optimise opportunities to participate in clinical trials</b>	-Map and promote existing clinical trials within R&RHS  -Join relevant clinical trial registers and determine rural opportunities  -Collaborate with NWCC Clinical Trials Unit	HNE Rural RC  R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Research office	Improved opportunity to participate in clinical trials  Improved treatment opportunities for our communities	June 2020  Ongoing

Goal 4 Enhance community engagement in R&RHS research				
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>4.1 Determine effective community participation initiatives and implement within R&amp;RHS</b>	-Seek community participation initiatives and considered suitability for rural communities  -Implement and evaluated agreed initiatives	HNE Rural RC  R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE RSDO	Improved awareness of consumer led research	Ongoing
<b>4.2 Improve opportunities for consumer led research</b>	-Consumer involvement encouraged on all new research projects  -Develop a registry of consumers keen to be involved in research  -Promote examples of consumer led research	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Rural RC	Consumer led research	Ongoing
<b>4.3 Build community awareness, and participation in R&amp;RHS research</b>	-Develop a communication strategy to promote R&RHS Research	R&RHS Research Coordinator  HNE Rural RC	Improved community awareness and opportunities for philanthropic support	July 2020

## Abbreviations

ACI	Agency for Clinical Innovation
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CIRH	Centres for Innovation in Regional Health (NSW Regional Health Partners)
HETI	Health Education and Training Institute
HMRI	Hunter Medical Research Institute
HNELHD	Hunter New England Local Health District
HNE Rural RC	Hunter New England Rural Research Committee
NWCC	Northwest Cancer Centre
PHN	Primary Health Network
R&RHS	Rural and Regional Health Services
UDRH	University Department of Rural Health
UNE	University of New England
UON	University of Newcastle



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