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# Rural Immersion Placement Program – Allied Health (RIPPAH)

Initiative Type

Service Improvement

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Deliver

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## Summary

The Rural Immersion Placement Program – Allied Health (RIPPAH) is a wrap-around support clinical education initiative. Students express interest in a RIPPAH experience to ensure those living and studying in the region have a passion for a rural health career. Students are immersed in the community during their extended placement where they are offered opportunities including social

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activities, rural experiences, optional part-time paid employment and interprofessional education components. Stakeholders are excited by evaluation results and application numbers highlighting RIPPAAH as a strong workforce pipeline strategy, with the process designed to be shared for scale and spread across disciplines and geographical locations. A committee passionate about rural placements in the South West HHS geographical area was formed, and utilising an implementation science approach to seek successful and sustainable solutions to the known barriers for student placements, a new Rural Immersion Placement Program- Allied Health (RIPPAAH) student placement experience was developed for, and by, the South West HHS.

### Key dates

Mar 2024

Mar 2024

### Implementation sites

South West Hospital and Health Service Roma Hospital, Charleville Hospital, St George Hospital

### Partnerships

Southern Queensland Rural Health and Queensland Universities, Office of the Chief Allied Health Officer

## Key Contacts

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## Aim

RIPPAH seeks to maximise opportunities for positive student experiences in rural and remote communities through local collaboration and by addressing internal and external barriers students and educators experience, thus providing a workforce passionate about rural health now and into the future.

## Benefits

- [a renewed, shared commitment to optimising student clinical placements in rural and remote regions](#)
- an improved organisational culture of translating workforce research into practice in relation to workforce pipeline strategies
- interested allied health students are well informed and view rural and remote placements as supported and highly sought-after opportunities
- enhanced allied health professional contribution to the selection and coordination of student placement in HHSs and health outcomes for consumers.

## Background

There is a recognised maldistribution in the allied health workforce across Australia that contributes to inequitable access to best practice, multi-disciplinary care for rural and remote communities. Workforce challenges in South West were well recognised, as was a commitment to developing local solutions to address the research to practice gaps.

## Solutions Implemented

Solutions included aspects such:

- coordinating placements of 10 weeks or more, collaborating with the university sector and local services to match the evidence for immersive rural and remote placements

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- providing free accommodation, bursaries and supporting students to access paid work to address student placement poverty factors (in partnership with the university, Department of Rural Health, local organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, local government, and private organisations)
  - centralised placement coordination, interprofessional education and paired placements to support student wellbeing and collaborative learning
  - placements offered in two or more settings to provide a rural generalist learning experience, enabling a 'work ready' future workforce
  - promotional website and student application via online expression of interest, matching student and university needs whilst promoting rural and remote placements as a sought-after placement experience
  - planning and selection involving local services to ensure a strong student fit and commitment to the model.

The RIPPAH model was trialled with physiotherapy and nutrition and dietetics students, with evaluation to develop resources and processes to meet university, student and service needs. Launching promotional resources and the online application website in 2023 the RIPPAH experience is now offered to physiotherapy, nutrition and dietetics, occupational therapy and speech pathology students in the South West, with further expansion underway.

## Evaluation and Results

The logic model includes outcome measures such as the number of RIPPAH applications received, placements offered and provided, stakeholder satisfaction, program resourcing and individual student outcomes measured using a Reach Effectiveness Adoption Implementation Maintenance (RE-AIM) evaluation framework. In the initial year (2023), a total of four offers for RIPPAH placements were submitted across Physiotherapy and Nutrition and Dietetics. We received 10 applicants and seven successful Physiotherapy and Nutrition and Dietetics students completed a RIPPAH placement in 2023. 100% of students identified positive experiences with RIPPAH and 100% would recommend RIPPAH to other students. All students felt the presence of other students in the community and/or co-located in accommodation enhanced their placement experience. Students participated in a wide range of immersive activities including social, sporting and tourism events. All students stated an intention to apply for rural positions in the future. Following the initial year, planning for 2024 has seen growth in professions undertaking the RIPPAH placement model, with Occupational Therapy and Speech Pathology also embarking on RIPPAH placements. We have seen total placements provided increase from four in 2023 to eight planned for 2024, and total placement days provided from 500 in 2023 to 800 planned in 2024. Following the transition to online applications for 2024 RIPPAH placements, significant increases in interest in this placement type has been seen, with 80 applications received across the disciplines Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Nutrition and Dietetics and Physiotherapy, originating from a wider range of universities. Applications received have been of exceptional quality, highlighting factors including rural origin, rural based support and intention to work rurally on graduation, supporting the aim. Clinician engagement in the RIPPAH selection process has resulted in greater appetite for hosting RIPPAH placements in the future. Thanks to RIPPAH, the SWHHS has seen the overall average duration of placements in Allied Health increase from 28.3 days per placement in 2022 (pre-RIPPAH) to 34.8 days in 2023 (23% increase).

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## Lessons Learnt

The Rural Immersion Placement Program for Allied Health provides solutions to both student and local service barriers, with a confirmed indication of student's willingness to work in rural roles post-graduation. Furthermore, high demand for RIPPAAH placements reflects a strong opportunity to attract the future workforce into regions experiencing workforce shortages when supports are in place. Following initial successes in the South West, scale and spread to other allied health professions and rural and remote areas in Queensland is progressing through state and local collaborations.

## References

[Final report – Improvement of access, quality and distribution of allied health services in regional, rural and remote Australia | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care Evaluation of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training \(RHMT\) program | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#) Unpublished literature review available on request.

## Further Reading

[Rural Immersion Placement Program - Allied Health \(RIPPAAH\) | Careers](#)

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