

The National Rural Health Student Network

First Nations Future Rural Health Professionals Program (FNFRHPP) 2024 Pilot Summary

The Future of Rural Health!

the future of rural health

A group of 10 healthcare students including three executive members of the National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) lead a team of clinicians and volunteers in delivery of the inaugural First Nations future Rural Health Professionals Program (FNFRHPP) in Yarrabah and Gordonvale from the 14th to 16th of October 2024. Represented in the wider team were members from Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (OAMS), Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP), Health Workforce Queensland, Rural Doctors Network and James Cook University (JCU).

Development of the program was led by First Nations student and the Vice Chair First Nations of the NRHSN, Emily Thompson with support from her executive team. Through all stages of development and rollout, the program was regularly reviewed by an Indigenous Working group and evaluated by several partnering organisations to ensure optimal sustainability and cultural appropriateness.

The program was made possible by the kind support of the following organisations:

- Health Workforce Queensland
- ABC Haywire
- Australia College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Orange AMS
- RAMHP
- Rural Doctors Network
- James Cook University

This program was the first of its kind and served as a pilot for what the NRHSN hopes to roll out nationally in the future either independently or in collaboration with other like-minded organisations.



The objective of the FNFRHPP is to promote careers in healthcare to First Nations primary and secondary students in rural and remote communities. The concept of “you can’t be what you can’t see” underpinned the program, with primary and secondary school students provided the opportunity to engage in practical, multidisciplinary workshops facilitated by our highly skilled

project delivery team. These workshops provide insight into what various healthcare disciplines do, whilst facilitating a culturally safe environment to learn and ask questions. The program seeks to both inspire and educate – providing a platform for First Nations students and clinicians to become role models for First Nations school children, whilst informing them of the supports available and pathways and career options after school.



While in Yarrabah and Cairns we visited four schools and reached over 250 children from 5 to 18 years of age. Our core delivery team of 13 consisted of a doctor, a physiotherapist, an Aboriginal health worker, a rural mental health specialist and students from various medical, nursing and allied health programs around Australia. We stayed as a team in Cairns, shopped and ate locally. This core team was generously supported by local James Cook University medical students who bolstered our numbers for program delivery.

We feel delivery of this pilot was an overwhelming success, with positive feedback received from students, teachers, community members, partnering organisations and members of our own team. Importantly, we took some key learnings from this experience and a reinforced determination to provide a culturally safe, locally supported and impactful program to First Nations children, led by First Nations students and health professionals. We gained a better understanding of how to better engage particular age groups or personalities and learned some valuable lessons in optimising time management. Whilst being a program primarily for school children, we acknowledge that both clinicians and university students involved in the program delivery were also privileged with a learning opportunity and experience in communicating with a vulnerable population.

A thorough post-event analysis and review was conducted amongst the team, and between team leaders and sponsoring organisations, participating schools and the Rural Health Commissioner. We identified the need for ongoing program evaluation to ensure the product being delivered is impactful, meets the needs of the communities we hope to service and sustainable in the longer term. We also hope to capture and present such findings to Government and non-government agencies as means of evidence for future funding.



The in summary, the week included a lot of triumphs and “firsts” including:

- The first outreach service delivery run by the NRHSN in collaboration with Rural Health Clubs and sponsors
- The first program for First Nations kids by First Nations students and health workers
- The first successful service delivery of what will hopefully continue as a national, annually delivered program for First Nations kids all around Australia



We are extremely proud of this program and what was achieved in 2024. We would like to acknowledge and thank all of those who have been involved, from inception to inaugural program delivery. We are excited and determined, to see this program grow into a powerful and sustainable national program, that makes a real difference to the health of First Nations Australians.

Pip Kensit

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pip Kensit', on a light-colored background.

Chair 2024
NRHSN

