



*the future of rural health*

# **Creating the next generation of climate change responsible health professionals**

**Carolyn Reimann & Ben Dodds  
National Rural Health Student Network**

# Overview

- Introduce the National Rural Health Student Network
- Climate Change Position Paper
  - Background
  - Position
  - Recommendations

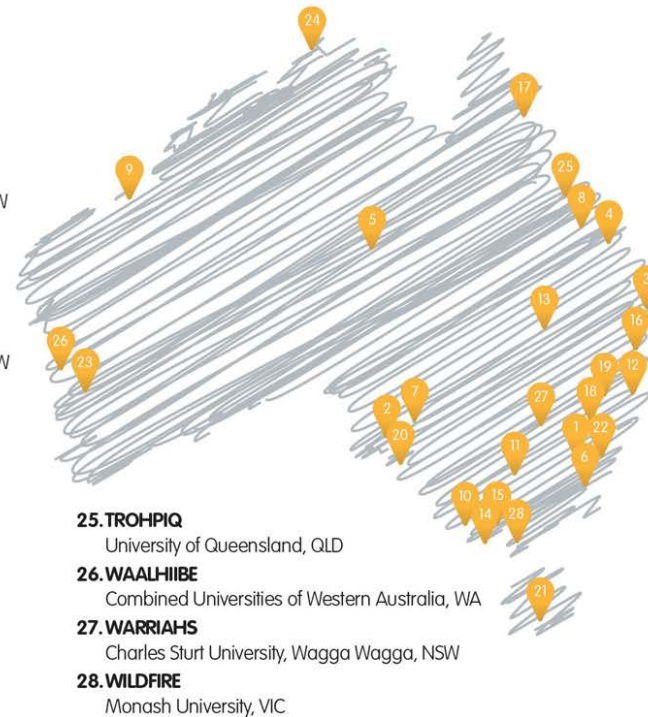
# National Rural Health Student Network

- Provides a voice for students interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians
- Promotes rural health careers to students, with the aim of addressing the workforce shortage in rural Australia

# nrhsn rural health clubs

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

# Climate Change Position Paper

NRHSN 2017

# Key Advocacy Areas

- 1) Clear, positive supported rural training pathways
- 2) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- 3) Mental Health
- 4) Health outcomes of Rural and Remote Australians

Our Climate Change Position paper fulfils our  
key advocacy areas 2) and 4)

# Working Group

- Carolyn Reimann (James Cook University- RHINO)
- Julia Skelton (James Cook University- RHINO)
- David Trench (University of Notre Dame- ROUNDS)
- Melanie Hoich (University of Notre Dame- ROUNDS)

# BACKGROUND



# Impact of Climate Change on Health

- Infectious and vector borne diseases
- Water related illness
- Temperature related death and illness
- Air Quality and Pollutants

# Impact of Climate Change on Health

- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Food Safety Nutrition and Distribution
- Social Determinants and Vulnerable populations

# Climate Change and Rural Health

Rural communities are often the most vulnerable and notice the effects of climate change before more urban populations

- **Direct**
  - altered temperatures and extreme weather events
  - air pollution
  - infectious disease
- **Indirect**
  - mental illness

# Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

- Highly vulnerable populations: disproportionate morbidity and mortality and habituation in rapidly changing regions
- Loss of homeland, livelihoods and culture
- Alterations to ecosystems resulting from climate change will diminish the relevance of traditional culture, and threaten both the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

# POSITIONS

## We recognize the scientific consensus that climate warming is caused by human activity

- Levels of **carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide** have increased and are now significantly higher than pre-industrial levels
- **Human actions**, such as agriculture and fossil fuel use, have led to this increase in greenhouse gas levels
- Climate change has **altered average global sea and air temperature**
- These global changes have **already resulted in weather extremes**, increases in ocean salinity and acidification, and changes in wind patterns
- These **changes will increase with current levels** of greenhouse gas emission

We believe that “Climate change is one of the greatest threats to global health”

- An increase in global temperatures and weather extremes will inevitably have **adverse effects on human health** due to:
  - Diminished food production
  - Displacement of peoples
  - Spread of diseases
  - Physical strain
  - Lost work capacity

## The most vulnerable Australians will be the first people to be adversely affected by Climate Change

- The health and welfare of our **rural, remote and Indigenous Australians** will be the first to be affected by climate change
- These populations have the **hardest time adapting to changes in our environment**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

# Overview

- Education and awareness
- Health services
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- Improved Rural Health Care
- Mental Health Services
- Support Clean and Efficient Energy
- Support local initiatives and reduce waste

# Education and Awareness

- The NRHSN calls for **universities** to establish a national framework for university curriculums, which educates future health professionals on the basics of climate change and the expected impact on health outcomes
- The NRHSN calls for **health services** to ensure that health professionals are able to recognize and respond to health impacts of climate change
- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to create a national public awareness program on the importance of the environment and the effects of climate change on health, and how to self-manage the symptoms of climate-associated illness
- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to increase surveillance on emerging diseases attributed to climate change including outbreaks of infectious diseases to accurately quantify the burden of disease caused by climate change.

# Health Services

- The NRHSN calls for **universities** and **rural health clubs** to support programs which encourage active and public forms of transport to reduce emission levels
- The NRHSN encourages **health services** to minimise waste and reduce emissions
- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to create targeted health programs designed to address multiple and varying exposures, for example, air pollution in those suffering from respiratory conditions such as asthma
- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to ensure health services have the resources for, and are prepared to, handle a surge in climate-related illness due to both acute extreme events and long-term consequences of climate change.
- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to improve access to healthcare for populations likely to be highly vulnerable to climate-associated illness

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to recognize the importance of the connection of land to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

# Improved Rural Health Care

- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to **improve equality in rural and remote Australian health** so communities are better equipped to deal with adverse health outcomes due to climate change.

This may include:

- **Improving security of food and water** access to communities during times of extreme weather events
- **Investing in infrastructure** to better cope with acute weather events

# Mental Health Services

- The NRHSN calls for the **government** and **health services** to improve **access to mental health services** which can be vital during times of drought and extreme weather conditions.

# Support clean and efficient energy

- The NRHSN calls for the **government** to support programs that will **decrease emissions** per capita by half in Australia by 2030
- The NRHSN calls for the **government, health services** and **universities** to **invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and low emissions technologies.**
- The NRHSN supports the **Carbon Neutral Program** to support businesses in going carbon neutral.



# Support local initiatives and reduce waste

- The NRHSN encourages **students, associates and Rural Health Clubs** to **support local businesses** where possible
- **Rural Health Clubs** should evaluate or cease the use of high waste merchandise to **avoid unnecessary waste and devise the use of environmental/carbon neutral merchandise/promotion options**
- **Rural Health Clubs** should promote to their universities to also implement purchasing from local businesses and cease the purchasing of high waste merchandise in favour of **no merchandise or environmental/carbon neutral options**

# Summary

The NRHSN is helping create a generation of environmentally responsible health professionals through the advocacy of the National Network and RHCs to local, state and national health services.

We are also devising a variety of RHC initiatives to help reduce waste and source locally as a network of rural health professionals