

Redefining Services for Rural Children and Youth: Rural School-Based Integrated Care

Background

Rural Australian children and young people (CYP) experience worse health and educational outcomes than their urban peers and have insufficient access to early intervention and supports (1, 2). Children in rural areas are up to three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable their first year of school (1). Rural paediatric outpatient waiting times as long as six years have been reported, and for children with developmental concerns, some areas in NSW have no paediatric service that accept their care (1, 3-5). A 2023 economic analysis showed that rural people miss out on \$850 per capita a year in health spend, compared to urban people (4).

Rural School Based Integrated Care (R-SBIC) supports students from preschool to the end of high school. Expanding on the success of GPs in Schools Programs in VIC and QLD, R-SBIC is cohesive and efficient, resulting in the added benefits of cost sharing, cost offsetting, and cost saving whilst remaining

effective and student focussed. A tiered, integrated model, planned supports are provided via virtual care when unavailable locally, reducing inequity for rural children and young people. Rural School Based Integrated Care (R-SBIC) provides:

- Coordinated, accessible foundational supports
- Improved access to GP and paediatric care
- Accessible ADHD and autism services
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Capacity building support for local staff

Methods

Using mixed methods, and with the assistance of a research assistant provided via competitive grant funding from the Peregrine Foundation, a formal implementation evaluation of the Eden pilot site, Djing.gii Gudjaagalali (Children Stars) School Clinic is currently in progress.



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Corin is a Rural Generalist-Paediatrics working for Southern NSW LHD. As a 2022 RRCBP candidate she is completing a PhD with University of NSW (UNSW). Using mixed methods, she is exploring “Strengthening paediatric primary care in rural Australia”. She plans to further investigate the role of Digital Interventions in reducing health inequity for rural children and young people (CYP), to describe CYP’s GP service use and temporal trends for mental health care, and to evaluate a novel model of GP-Paediatric virtual care, SUSTAIN, in Rural Australia.

Progress

Since applying for the RRCBP Program, Corin has established a novel model of GP-led, school based integrated care in Eden NSW. This model now provides care to a community of six schools, both primary and high school, and has started expanding the reach of the clinic into local preschools. By collaborating with clinician researchers in Sydney, the model is now being expanded within the region, and NSW parliamentarians have requested a formal proposal to scale up the model more broadly across rural NSW.

Corin won the Rural Health Professional of the Year award in 2023. Corin is working with her PhD supervisory team at UNSW and the University of Melbourne, as well as with colleagues at University of Sydney to collaborate on multiple

research grant applications. She hopes to become a leading rural clinician researcher at the culmination of her PhD studies, with the hope of improving health and educational outcomes for the >1.36 million children living outside urban centres in Australia.

Potential Implications

Strengthening paediatric primary care in rural Australia can help the next generation of Australians living outside urban centres to achieve equity in health and educational outcomes, helping to address the social determinants of health and education, positively transforming the life trajectory of rural children.

Keywords

Paediatric, primary care, school-based, health equity, ADHD, autism, developmental, mental health, rural or remote, digital interventions