

Strengthening the Northern Territory Remote Health Workforce

Co-designing a Graduate Nurse Program for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services

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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of their lands upon which we walk, reside, and work. We pay our respects to First Nations peoples of the Northern Territory and to the traditional custodians of the lands we're meeting on today, Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation.



BACKGROUND

Despite national growth (26%) in the nursing workforce in Australia, the number of nurses working in very remote areas has stagnated or declined between 2013 and 2022 (Ajayi et al., 2024).

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) in the Northern Territory face chronic and critical workforce shortages, with non-Indigenous clinical staff turnover rates exceeding 160% annually. (NT PHN, 2024).

In some regions, agency nurses now comprise 50–80% of the workforce, costing individual services between \$100,000 and \$2 million per year and resulting in compromised continuity of care, culturally misaligned healthcare systems, and overstretched permanent teams (NT PHN, 2024). The estimated cost of one agency nurse for 12 months, excluding overtime was \$386,240.

New graduate nurses (NGN) are underrepresented due to a lack of structured support, clinical readiness and available targeted NGN programs (Hart et al., 2014; Lea & Cruickshank, 2015).

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Graduate Nurse Program successfully addressed workforce issues (CAAC, 2024).



AIM

Expand the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Graduate Nurse Program model to other remote NT ACCHS in order to achieve the following objectives.

- Establish a structured and supportive transition-to-practice pathway for New Graduate Nurses entering remote practice.
- Reduce dependency on agency staff by building a skilled, culturally competent, and stable remote nursing workforce.
- Improve recruitment, retention, and clinical outcomes through context-responsive education and support mechanisms.



PARTICIPATING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED HEALTH SERVICES

- Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation, Tennant Creek and Barkly Region.
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Alice Springs and remote central desert.
- Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation, Western Katherine region.
- Mala'la Health, North-East Arnhem Land.
- Marthakal Homelands and Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation North-East Arnhem Land.
- Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation Health, East-Arnhem Land.
- Red Lily Health Board, West-Arnhem Land.
- Sunrise Aboriginal Health Service, Eastern Katherine region.
- Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, Katherine township and surrounding communities



METHODS

Co-designed using a participatory action research (PAR) framework.
The process involved four key stages:

1. Engagement and governance committees established.

2. Evidence and needs analysis

Curriculum
development

Feedback evidence
to committees

Consultations
& co-design

Remote career
pathway

Feasibility and
sustainability plan

4. Implementation plan





PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Structured 18-month program with the following components:

- Orientation: A two-week foundational workshop focused on cultural safety, Primary Health Care (PHC) principles, and clinical skills.
- Cultural Safety: Delivered in partnership with Aboriginal mentors and health practitioners, supported by Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) standards and Indigenous Allied Health Australia's (IAHA) Cultural Responsiveness Framework.
- Education & Training: Integration of accredited courses (eg. Remote Emergency Care/ Maternity Emergency Care [REC/MEC], University short courses), weekly tutorials, and quarterly study blocks.
- Mentorship & Support: Remote Clinical Educators, peer networks, structured supervision, and resilience training.






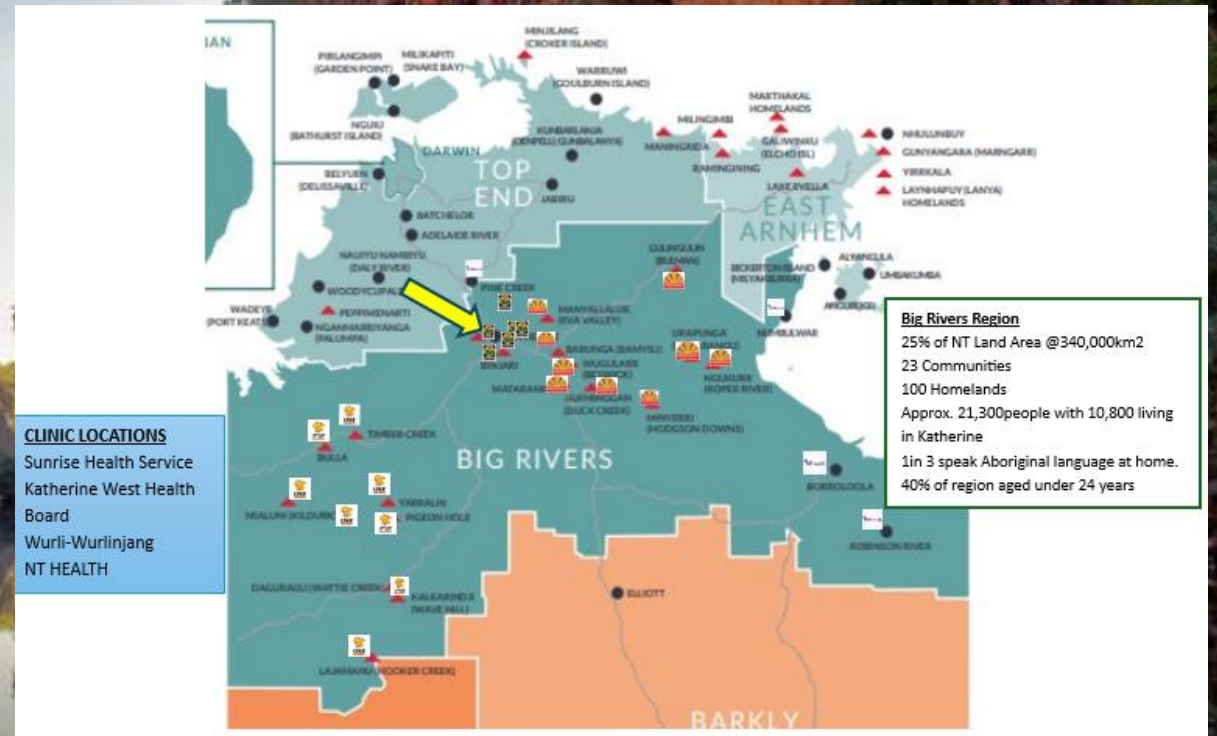
CURRICULUM MODEL

The National Rural and Remote Nursing Generalist Framework 2023-2027		Content		Integrating themes
	Culturally Safe Practice	Foundations of Remote Area Nursing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Safety • Primary Health Care • Social Determinants of Health • Health promotion and Disease prevention • Public health principles 	Advanced Clinical Remote Area Nursing Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical assessments • RAN Model of Consultation • Health checks across the lifespan • Management of acute and chronic conditions. • Management of emergencies and trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Safety • Primary Health Care • Social Determinants of Health • Reflective Practice • Evidence Based Decision Making • Ethical Practice • Teamwork and Collaborative Practice • Strengths-based approach • Aboriginal Health and Worldview
	Critical Analysis			
	Relationships, Partnerships and Collaboration			
	Capability for Practice			
Underpinning Principles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs Based • Responsive to community & industry • Applies to practice • Accessible Flexible Delivery • Increases workforce capacity 				

New Nurse Graduate Program in the Big Rivers (Katherine Region)

- Employment of an additional Clinical Educator (Funding by NT PHN)
- NGN positions currently being advertised ([Graduate Nursing Program - Big Rivers - Northern Territory PHN](#))

BIG RIVERS REGION HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS			
	Sunrise Health Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barunga • Bulman • Jilkminggan • Manyallaluk (Eva Valley) • Mataranka • Minyerri • Ngukurr • Urapunga (Rittarangu) • Weemol • Wugularr (Beswick) 		Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binjari • Geyulkgan Ngurro (Walpiri Camp) • Jodetluk (Gorge Camp) • Katherine • Myalli Brumby (Kalano) • Rockhole
			Katherine West Health Board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amanbidji (Kildurk) • Bulla • Kalkaringi • Lajamanu • Lingara • Nitjpurru (Pigeon Hole) • Timber Creek • Yarralin



New Nurse Graduate Program in the Big Rivers (Katherine Region)

A structured 18 month program supporting graduate nurses to develop into Remote Area Nurses, developing skills in:

- Primary health care, including immunisation & pharmacotherapeutics certifications
- Emergency acute care, trauma & patient retrievals
- Chronic disease management and health promotion
- Community engagement and culturally safe practice

NGNs will work closely with Health Centre Managers, senior clinicians and our Graduate Nurse Program Educator to build your skills and confidence in a supported environment with clinicians who understand the value of becoming a RAN and remember what it felt like when you start out.

We're seeking graduates who are:

- Passionate about improving health outcomes in Aboriginal communities
- Open-minded, respectful, and culturally aware
- Willing to live and work in remote locations
- Strong communicators who enjoy working in a team
- Motivated to learn and grow into a Remote Area Nurse

Please email GNP@sunrise.org.au or call our Nurse Educator 0427 510 727

So far there have been 30 enquiries and 8 applications



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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