

the future of rural health



# Rural Placements Guide

How to make the most of your rural placement

NRHSN

National Rural Health  
Students Network



The National Rural Health Students' Network (NRHSN) would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for their contribution to the development of this guide.



[2006 NRHSN Placements Guide Committee](#)  
[2006 NRHSN Executive](#)  
[2008 NRHSN Executive](#)  
[2011 NRHSN Executive](#)  
[2011 Community and Advocacy Portfolio](#)  
[2011 Indigenous Health Portfolio](#)

Members of the 2006 NRHSN Council and the 9,000+ NRHSN members, who have provided valuable insight into their rural and remote placement experiences.

Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN)  
Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators (FRAME)

Copies of this publication can be downloaded from [www.nrhsn.org.au/ruralplacementsguide](http://www.nrhsn.org.au/ruralplacementsguide)

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This publication provides a summary only of the subject matter covered, without the assumption of a duty of care by the National Rural Health Students' Network, Rural Health Workforce or any of the parties involved in its creation. The summary is not intended to be nor should it be relied upon as a substitute for legal or other professional advice.

#### References

[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)  
[www.ruralhealth.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.ruralhealth.unimelb.edu.au)  
[www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au)  
[www.drh.med.usyd.edu.au](http://www.drh.med.usyd.edu.au)  
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[www.ruraldoc.com.au](http://www.ruraldoc.com.au)  
[www.healthrecruitmentplus.com.au](http://www.healthrecruitmentplus.com.au)  
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[www.healthworkforce.com.au](http://www.healthworkforce.com.au)

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# Why Should I consider a rural or remote Placement?

There are many advantages to participating in a rural or remote placement that may not be available in metropolitan placements. The wide variety of tasks performed by rural health professionals ensures that you will develop a strong sense of teamwork, flexibility and an increased skill set.


Rural and remote placements offer the opportunity for medical, nursing, allied health, pharmacy and dentistry students to further their professional development in an environment that offers many new experiences. This includes the chance to meet new people in both professional and social circumstances, which can lead to lifelong friendships, mentorships and professional relationships. Rural and remote placements provide a realistic understanding of rural health service provision and the skills required for a career out bush. On completion, students have a greater sense of confidence and increased skills and knowledge.

Students are often given a higher sense of autonomy and responsibility which enhances confidence. In some areas, students will discover that rural health care workers may have limited access to some equipment and resources. This in itself requires innovation and flexibility in the provision of patient care. Rural and remote placements encourage students to develop a professional network through closer dealings with other staff including specialists from both health and community agencies.

Placements in rural and remote areas of Australia offer the opportunity to increase your understanding of the unique health issues of people living in the bush.

Working in Indigenous communities is an amazing experience that offers students the chance to learn about different cultural groups, while seeing first hand what improvements they could make by choosing to practice in a rural or remote location after graduating. Why wouldn't you consider a rural placement?

// I'm learning about working in a team setting in conjunction with many other health professionals, but am also making decisions on my own within this team. I doubt I would have this same amount of input into a person's care and feel as ready for the future if I was studying in the city!  
AURHA Rural Health Club Member //



There are many things to organise before you go on your rural or remote placement. To ensure that your placement is successful, you will need to do some research before you begin. Here are a few things to consider when planning your placement.

## Placement

Your university will generally provide you with the dates and duration for your placement. You need to check with your university placement supervisor whether you will need to organise your rural placement yourself or if they will assist or organise it. Some universities will pay for or subsidise costs such as travel and accommodation. Your placement supervisor will be the best person to speak to about this.

## Transport

Many rural and remote towns and communities have very limited (if any) public transport facilities. This will need to be a major consideration in your decision to participate in a rural placement. Before your placement is organised, you will need to decide how you will get there. Options might include train, bus, plane or driving your own car. You will need to investigate whether there are train or bus services, as well as considering the condition of your car and your experience and confidence in driving long distances.

You will need to research what the local public transport options are, and whether there are taxi services. You should also consider the distance between your accommodation and workplace. You will have to organise how to get to work and decide whether you can walk there, or if you will need transport. You may consider taking your bike or finding out if you are able to hire one.

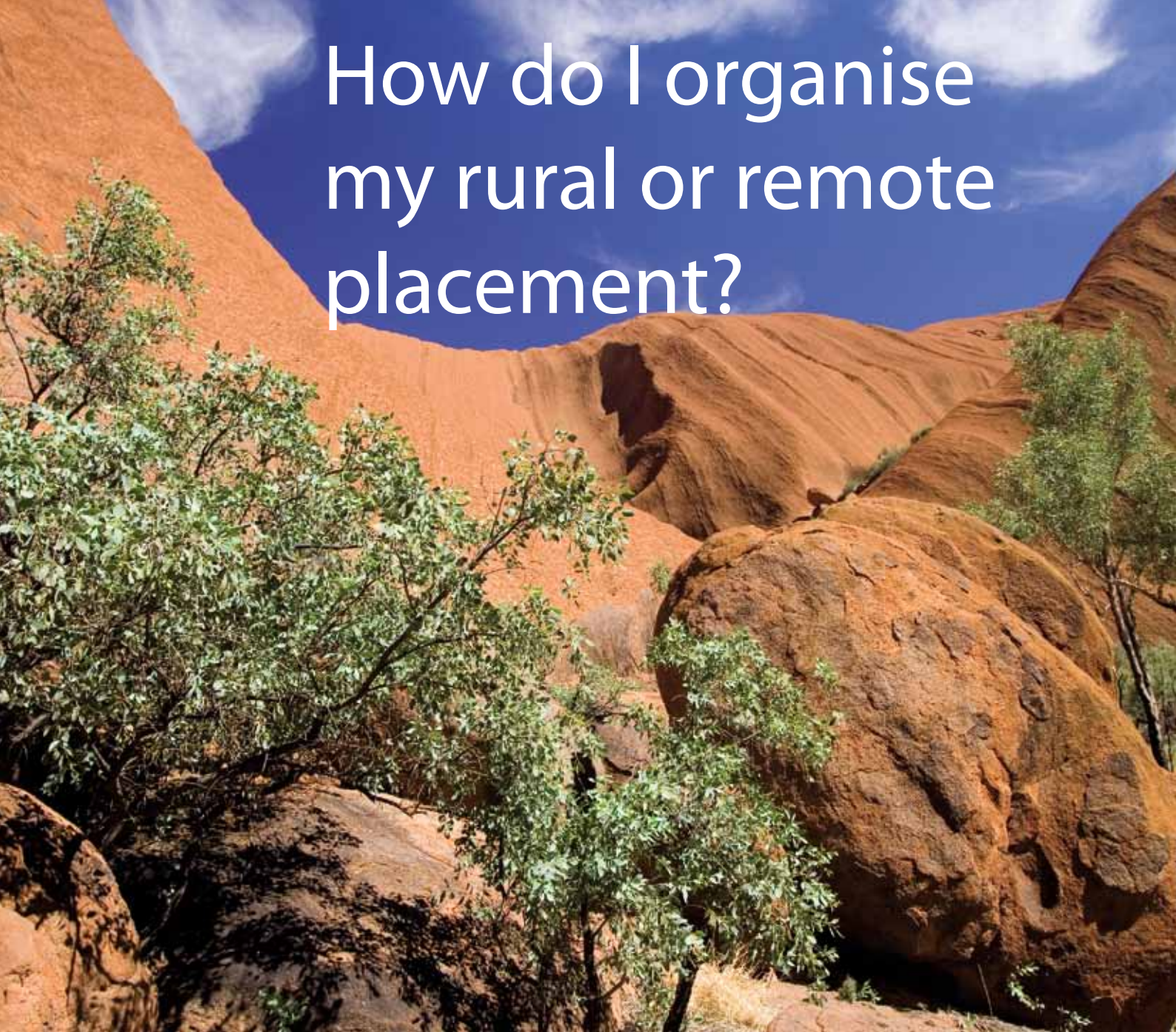
## Accommodation

Your accommodation is a very important consideration in your decision to undertake a rural or remote placement. You need to find out what accommodation is available, if there is any through your university or your workplace or whether your supervisor can recommend somewhere and any costs associated. You need to research what facilities are available i.e. cooking facilities and utensils, bed linen, laundry, TV, fridge etc. Ensure you know their contact details, including arrangements for picking up your keys on arrival.



Accommodation is often available at local hospitals at a low cost.

# How do I organise my rural or remote placement?





## Community

To make your placement easier to settle in to and to make the most of your stay, you should learn about the town before you go.

A good place to start is by contacting the Tourist Centre if one exists or searching the internet. Find out about the size of the population, climate, the demographics of the town, what other health services are available if any, and the geography. Buy or download a map of the town before you go. It is also important to research what services and recreational facilities are offered.

If you enjoy going to the movies you should find out if they have a cinema, or if you play sport or exercise find out about the local gym, sporting events or other activities you can participate in during your stay.

Banks and shops in rural and remote towns may have different opening hours to those in the city and you do not want to be left without food or money. You may like to find out the location of the nearest church or place of religious worship. It is also worth finding out about the availability of internet and mobile coverage.

The client population is also something to consider, and may influence the kinds of injuries that may be common eg. the common injuries in a crayfishing town will be different to those common in a mining town. Look up the town/community on the internet and ask the clinic for recommended reading about the area.

## Recommended Readings

- Australia's Rural and Remote Health: A social justice perspective
- CRANApplus clinical procedures for remote and rural practice
- Central Australian Rural Practitioners Association (CARPA) reference manual
- CARPA standard treatment manual
- Women's business manual
- Bridging cultures in Aboriginal health
- No Shame Job: a health career information guide for Indigenous students
- Opportunities as vast as the landscape: working in rural and remote health



- 'To make your placement easier to settle in to and to make the most of your stay, you should learn about your town before you go.'

### Family & Friends

You will experience a culture shock to some degree while you are living in a town or community different to your own. This is normal, everyone who travels experiences this—it may be more profound in the more isolated communities in Australia. Do some reading on this before you go.

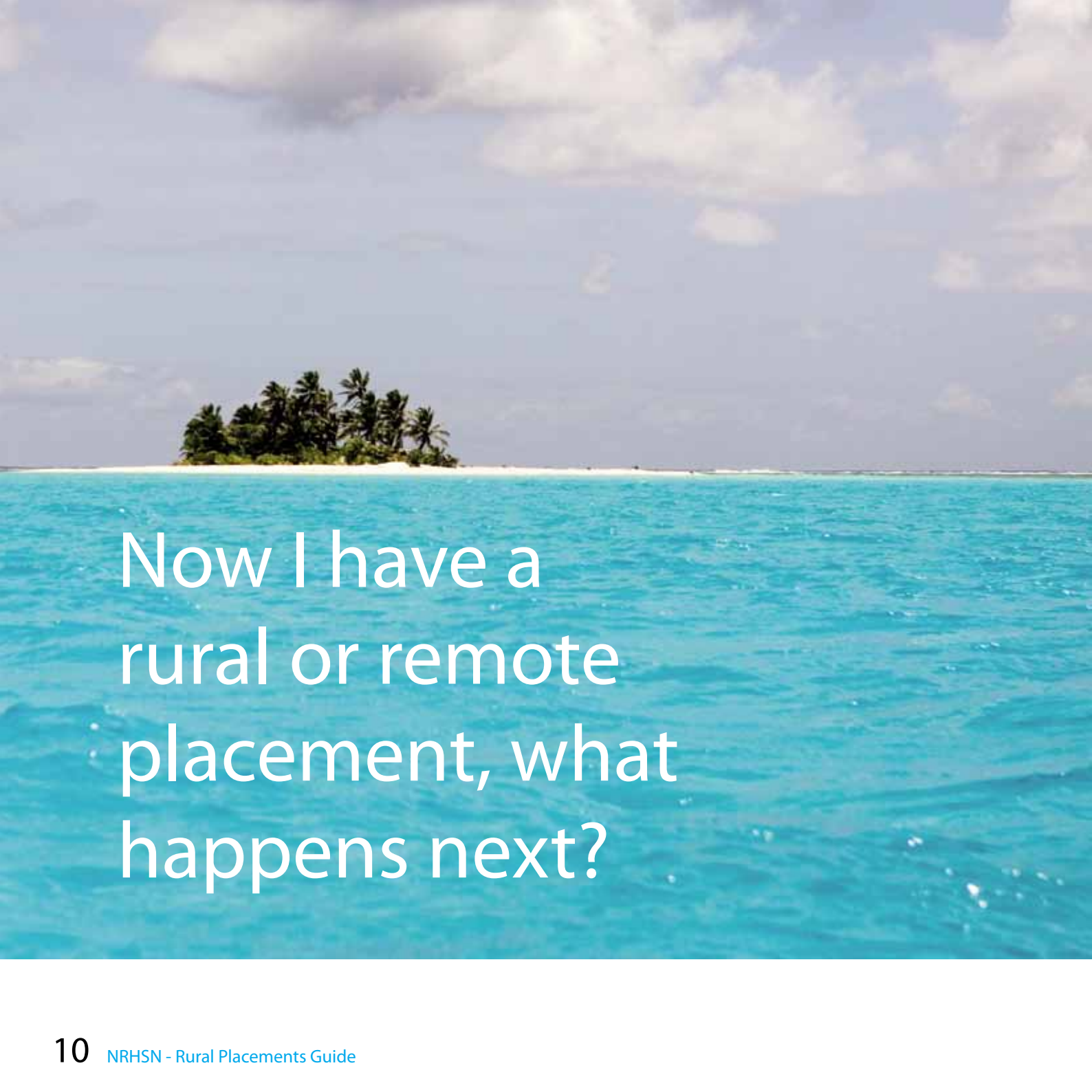
Some students undertaking a rural or remote placement may feel a little homesick being away from family and friends. It is important to recognise that this could occur and try to develop strategies for coping with it before you leave. Make sure that you know how you will keep in contact with your family, partner and friends.

While you may miss your loved ones, you can still enjoy your country experience by getting involved as much as possible. Go out and join in community events and meetings, sporting activities, markets, Lions/Rotary while you are there. Accept social invitations from colleagues and people that you meet outside of work. Take time to explore the local area.



Being prepared and organised before leaving will help make your placement a fun and rewarding experience. Refer to the 'Essential Placement Checklist' on page 19 to help you.





Now I have a  
rural or remote  
placement, what  
happens next?

Now you have organised your placement and researched the town, transport and accommodation, it is time to concentrate on your actual placement and what your expected outcomes are. You should have a clear understanding of what you want to achieve during your placement and also what is expected of you.

## Supervisor

A phone call or email to your supervisor to introduce yourself is a great opportunity to discuss your placement and ask questions.

You should try to determine what your expected tasks and caseload will be like. You will be able to discuss your work hours, uniform or dress code, available facilities such as a computer or library, who you will be working with, whether there will be other students, whether you need to take anything with you and what is expected of you.

Gathering as much information as possible beforehand will provide you with the best opportunity for a successful placement.

## Contact Details

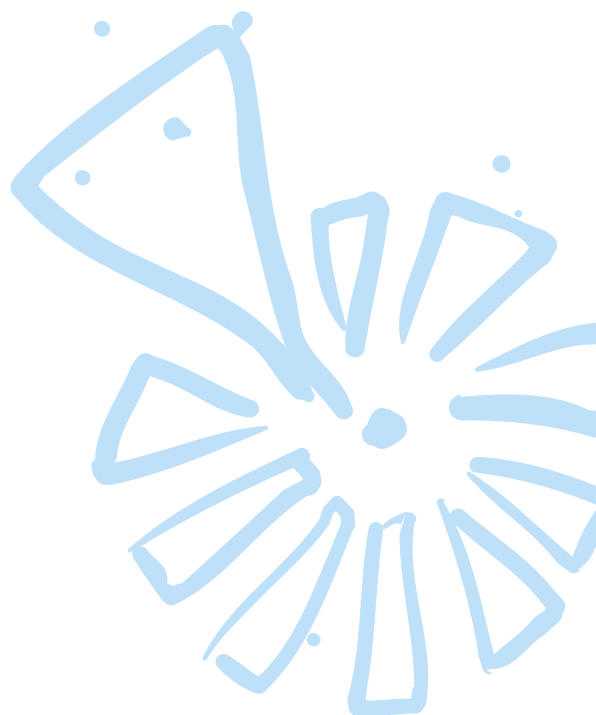
Make sure you fill out the details of your placement on the Contact page (page 18) of this guide, so you have easily accessible contact information when you need it.

Also include your university website and support/counselling service contact details on page 17.

It is very important to stay in contact with family and friends during your placement, so ensure you have a current list of their contact details, as well as providing them with your phone number while away.

✓ **Read through the Checklist (page 19) and tick off all points that are applicable to you.**

“ I have a better idea of what I do not know and have the confidence to further seek information and experiences in this area. There is just so much more out there than I had realised! ”  
TROHPIQ Rural Health Club Member





## Cultural Awareness

All communities have their own culture, whether mining, farming, tourist or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As with any cultural learning experience, unwitting errors and embarrassments are likely to occur, but they will allow you to learn and be better prepared for the future.

An awareness of the differences in cultural values and a commitment to developing sufficient understanding will help the process of adjusting to a different culture. Some universities and workplaces provide opportunities for cultural awareness training, so ask if this is available to you.

The path of adjustment can be easier if the student finds a cultural mentor from within the local population. With a mentor, mistakes will become lessons, and repeating them over and over again will become avoidable. Seek out Indigenous Health Workers and Aboriginal Liaison Officers if appropriate and ask for their advice.

**i** Undertaking cultural awareness training before placements is a great way to help you gain an understanding of cultural beliefs and avoid errors that may offend community members, which can in turn negatively impact on the provision of health care and your experience.

While adjusting to a new culture, remember that flexibility, sensitivity, respect for difference, a nonjudgemental approach and optimism are key factors for developing relationships within a new community.

Being culturally aware starts with being aware of your own culture, values and assumptions. Aboriginal cultural awareness means having knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people's history, values, belief systems, experience and lifestyles. It is not about becoming an expert on Aboriginal culture; however it is about being aware of the differences that exist, appreciating and having an understanding of those differences, and accepting them.

## Recommended Readings

'Australia's rural and remote health: a social justice perspective', by Janie Dade Smith

'Bridging cultures in Aboriginal health', by Binang Goonj



Keeping a journal can be a very effective way to track your progress and record your lessons and successes.

## Useful Links

Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet - Web resource for people interested in improving the health of Indigenous Australians.

[www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

Cultural Diversity - A guide for Health Professionals was developed by the Queensland Government and profiles the health of different cultures.

[www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/health\\_workers/cultdiver\\_guide.asp](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/health_workers/cultdiver_guide.asp)

Reconciliation Australia - Building relationships for change between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

[www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

[www.hreoc.gov.au](http://www.hreoc.gov.au)

## Scholarships

Some rural and remote placements will be subsidised or paid for by your university, however not all universities cover these costs. Below is a list of scholarships that may help you to meet the costs of your rural or remote placement, or provide other opportunities for you to undertake a placement in a rural community.

### Medical Students

John Flynn Placements Program

[www.acrrm.org.au](http://www.acrrm.org.au)

AMSA Rural and Indigenous Bursary

[www.amsa.org.au](http://www.amsa.org.au)

Rural Australian Medical Undergraduate Scholarships

[www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)

NSW Rural Doctors Network Bush Bursary

[www.nswrdn.com.au](http://www.nswrdn.com.au)

Working Holidays for Undergraduates (HUGS)

[www.rmfn.org.au](http://www.rmfn.org.au)

### Nursing Students

Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (NAHSSS)

[www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)

Continuing Professional Education Scheme for Rural and Remote Nurses

[www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)

Aged Care Nursing Scholarship Scheme: Undergraduate

[www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)

Aged Care Nursing Scholarship Scheme: Postgraduate

[www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)

Nursing Student Remote Placement Scholarship

[www.crana.org.au](http://www.crana.org.au)

### Allied Health Students

Rural and Remote Pharmacy Placement Scholarship

[www.guild.org.au](http://www.guild.org.au)

Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (NAHSSS)

[www.sarrah.org.au](http://www.sarrah.org.au)

### All Disciplines

Dr William Hunter Scholarship

[www.nswrdn.com.au](http://www.nswrdn.com.au)

Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au)



Check out the NRHSN website [www.nrhsn.org.au/scholarships](http://www.nrhsn.org.au/scholarships) for more scholarships that may be available.



## Keeping Safe

When on a rural or remote placement, you will need to consider your personal safety just as you would anywhere. This is important both in clinical and non-clinical situations. These are just some hints that may be useful, not only on placements but anywhere. Also, it is important to consider that at some point in your career, you may encounter an aggressive patient.

Some important tips (use this list as a starting point to consider other issues that may arise):

- Make an informal risk assessment for yourself, considering issues such as transport, accommodation (including the availability of a phone and mobile coverage) and supervision before you go.
- Do not walk around the town or community by yourself at night, in unlit areas, or in isolated locations.
- Ask a local mentor about what places should be avoided in the community for cultural or safety reasons.
- Observe local customs in terms of culturally appropriate dress.
- Lock your accommodation at night or when out during the day.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back, even by an SMS to a friend, if leaving the community for sightseeing etc.
- Ensure you have the appropriate driving skills if driving over unsealed roads and tell someone if you do not feel confident. Plan your travel to, from and around the community. Identify fuel availability, weather and road warnings and always carry maps and water.
- When beginning your placement, ask about safety procedures, personal alarms and location of a 'safe room' or location in the event of an aggressive patient.
- Do not approach or confront an aggressive patient or community member but ensure your safety first and follow the advice of your supervisors.
- Do not get involved or take sides in personal disputes between community members.



**A general safety principle to keep in mind is do not do anything that you would not do at home. Also, follow the local rules - there will be a reasonable rationale for them.**

## Managing Disclosures

While on placement, students can sometimes be in the position of having a patient or community member disclose an incident of abuse, violence or rape to them or someone else. Each state and territory has different laws and practices which may require you to report such an incident to an authority (eg. the police or a child protection agency depending on the locality). These are known as mandatory reporting obligations.

It is important that you know what to do in these situations and that you know the mandatory reporting requirements and local protocols that apply where you are working. You should ensure that you talk with your supervisor when you first start your placement and are fully aware of the process in the service and state or territory in which you are working.

**The information below is meant to be a starting point - it is not a substitute for following the mandatory reporting obligations.**

It is essential that you immediately tell your supervisor about violence, rape or abuse reported by patients. You should explain to the patient that you need to do this. Your supervisor has the advanced skills and professional contacts necessary to deal with these situations which, as a student, you have probably not yet acquired. They will also be trained in the implementation of local protocols for dealing with such a situation.

While most consultations are usually confidential, most guidelines state that the situation needs to be reported in certain circumstances – read your local guidelines for further information on this. Mandatory reporting requirements in most states mean that these situations need to be reported to the appropriate bodies if involving young people.

If you are in a situation where you are required to report a situation to authorities, it is best not to ask leading questions but let the patient tell the story in their own words, as this can influence further investigation. Document the conversation in your notes using an “I said”, “He/She said” format if possible, trying to use their exact words. This should be countersigned by your supervisor.

These situations can be extremely distressing for everyone involved, including you! Make sure you debrief with skilled people and use the support services listed in this booklet. They are there to help you. Your supervisor and university should provide strong support if you do find yourself in a situation like this.

## What should I do if things go wrong?

Despite all the best planning and intentions, sometimes things can go wrong. You may not get along with your supervisor, your accommodation might not be what you expected, you may not be achieving what you wanted from your placement, you might be feeling lonely or missing home, friends and family. The good news is...


...that your problems can usually be sorted out and a successful placement can still be achieved! The first thing to do is sort out what is not going right and the reasons why.

Always try to talk out any problem with the team. They may be able to rectify the situation or have ideas to overcome the issue. It may be a miscommunication, misunderstanding or different interpretation of an event that can be resolved by open and honest discussion. This is good practice for the real world when you graduate.

If this does not work, then you may need to consider who the best person will be. If the problem is work related and you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about it, then that will most likely be the quickest and easiest solution. If you are not able to speak to your supervisor, you might be able to discuss it with other staff members or your university placement coordinator. Other students who are on placement with you, or who have had similar experiences in the past will generally be able to offer advice.

If you are feeling lonely or things are not going well personally, then contacting family or friends might help. Other support services include your university support/counselling service or national support lines where people are there to listen and help you work out solutions.

Contact numbers and websites for useful placement help and support services are listed on the next page. You can also find very useful contacts and information in the NRHSN's Mental Health Guide 'When the Cowpat Hits the Windmill' which you can find at [www.nrhsn.org.au/mhg](http://www.nrhsn.org.au/mhg).

 **The most important thing to remember is to seek help or advice if things do start to go wrong. Often, they can be sorted out easily and with the best outcomes for everyone, as long as you let people know something is wrong.**

“ My rural placement this year is the best way I could dream of to not only prepare me for the coming exams, but also for my future as a doctor (in a rural area I hope!) ”  
AURHA Rural Health Club Member





## Useful Websites/Contact Numbers

### Placements

- National Rural Health Students' Network which includes links to the Rural Health Clubs based at universities throughout Australia [www.nrhsn.org.au](http://www.nrhsn.org.au)
- Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- Your university website should provide information specific to rural placements at your university  
(Please fill in your university details):.....
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) [www.acrrm.org.au](http://www.acrrm.org.au)
- Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) [www.arhen.org.au](http://www.arhen.org.au)
- CRANaplus [www.crana.org.au](http://www.crana.org.au)
- National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) [www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)
- Royal Flying Doctors Service of Australia (RFDS) [www.flyingdoctor.net](http://www.flyingdoctor.net)
- Rural and Remote Medical Education Online [www.rrmeo.com](http://www.rrmeo.com)
- Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) [www.sarrah.org.au](http://www.sarrah.org.au)
- University Departments of Rural Health websites have both general and specific information. Links to all UDRH's can be found on the ARHEN and DoHA websites.
- Western Australia Country Health Service website has useful general placement information, as well as WA specific information. [www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au)

### Support/Help

- Your university Support/Counselling service (fill in your university's phone number):.....
- *beyondblue* 1300 224 636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- Bush Crisis Line and Support Services 1800 805 391 [www.bcl.org.au](http://www.bcl.org.au)  
BCL is a twenty-four hour telephone support and debriefing service for multi-disciplinary remote and rural health practitioners and their families.
- Lifeline 131 114 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Mensline 1300 789 978 [www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)
- Reachout [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)
- Sane 1800 187 263 [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)
- Doctors Health Advisory Service (see website for state based numbers) [www.doctorshealth.org.au](http://www.doctorshealth.org.au)



## Placement Contacts

### Student Details

Name:.....  
Mobile Phone:.....  
Email Address: .....  
University: .....  
Course/Year: .....  
University Supervisor:.....  
University Supervisor Phone:.....

### Placement Details

Contact Person:.....  
Contact Phone Number:.....  
Contact Email:.....  
Location: .....  
Dates: .....  
Accommodation:.....  
Accommodation Phone:.....  
Travel Arrangements:.....  
.....  
.....

**i** Build up a good relationship with your supervisor or mentor while you are on your placement. Ask questions, see patients, ask to learn more skills. The more interest that you show your mentor, the better your relationship and placement experience will be.

Notes.....  
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# Essential Placement Checklist

## General

- Have you spoken to your supervisor and discussed both your expectations?
- Have you spoken to your university placements supervisor about possible subsidies, reimbursement and costs?
- Have you spoken to your university placements supervisor about whether you need to arrange individual indemnity insurance for your placement?
- What facilities will be available to you (computer, internet, shops, library etc)?
- Have you considered applying for a scholarship?
- How will you keep in touch with friends and family?

## What to pack

- Itinerary
- Indemnity insurance cover letter
- Towels, linen, alarm clock, food etc if needed
- Do you need to take any resources/text books with you?
- Student ID card/badge
- Immunisation papers
- Criminal record clearance
- Working With Children Check
- Money - small amount of cash, not only credit/EFTPOS cards
- Camera - take lots of photos as you are bound to have a ball! Remember that photos in some Indigenous communities may not be welcomed, so be sure to ask permission.

## Transport

- Do you know the best transport option to get to your placement? ie. Bus, train, plane or drive your own car?
- Is your car in a safe condition to drive long distances?
- Do you have enough confidence and experience to drive long distances and on unsealed roads?
- How will you get around the community?
- Are there public transport services? What hours do they operate?
- How will you get to your workplace?
- Do you know if a taxi service is available? What is the phone number?
- Are you better off taking your own transport (car, bike etc)?

## Arrival

- Do you need to notify your workplace of your flight/bus times?
- Have you organised to be picked up on arrival?
- Do you know how/where to pick up your accommodation keys?

## Accommodation

- Do you know where your accommodation is located?
- Do you know the contact details?
- What facilities does your accommodation have? eg fridge, washing machine, cooking utensils, bed linen, TV.

## Uniform/Clothes

- Do you have a uniform/what is your dress code?
- What clothing will you require in your spare time? ie consider the weather, activities, special/ community events etc.
- Are your clothes culturally appropriate?

## Meals

- Are meals provided?
- Have you advised of any dietary requirements (vegetarian, allergies etc) if meals are provided?
- Do you have cooking facilities in your accommodation?
- What shopping facilities are available?

## Contact Details

- Have you filled in your contact details (page 18 of this guide)?
- Do you have contact details for your workplace, accommodation, university placement supervisor, friends and family etc?

## Community

- Have you researched the community (geography, demographics, activities, attractions, churches etc)?
- Have you planned some recreational activities for your spare time?

the future of rural health



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[www.rhwa.org.au](http://www.rhwa.org.au)