

Meeting Youth Where They Are: A Rural School Model Redefining Access to Healthcare

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Background/Purpose:

Narromine is a rural town in Central West New South Wales with limited access to paediatric and allied health services. Narromine High School, which has 240 students, over 70% of whom identify as Aboriginal recognised the growing gap between the health needs of young people and the availability of services. In response, the school established the Narromine Wellbeing Hub, a multidisciplinary health and wellbeing centre located on campus. This initiative aims to transform how care is provided to rural youth by delivering services directly within the school, ensuring equitable, culturally safe, and timely access to coordinated support. The Hub works collaboratively towards improving educational outcomes, health, and social wellbeing to help close the gap for Aboriginal students and the wider community.

Approach:

The Hub was developed through a partnership between the education, health, and community sectors and is housed in a repurposed on-site residence at Narromine High School. Its multidisciplinary team, assembled based on community and student needs, includes education staff, a paediatrician, general practitioner, nurse, exercise physiologist, psychologist, school wellbeing staff, and various visiting specialists. Students can access services through self-referral or be referred by teachers or family members, with all interventions guided by consent-based shared care plans. Data on attendance, engagement, and wellbeing outcomes is systematically collected to inform ongoing practice and measure the Hub's impact.

Outcomes/Impact:

Since opening, the Hub has supported provided supports to all students through screenings, plans and more. The paediatric program has provided support to over 100 students since its first clinic and has seen 100% attendance. Outcomes include improved school attendance, increased self-regulation, reduced stigma around seeking health care, and enhanced collaboration between health and education professionals. Families report greater trust and reduced travel burden, while teachers observe stronger engagement and earlier intervention for emerging health and wellbeing needs.

Innovation and Significance:

Since its launch, the Hub has provided support to all students through health screenings, individual care plans, and other services. The paediatric program has supported over 100 students since its inaugural clinic, achieving a 100% attendance rate. Over 90% of students have accessed the GP for assessments and consultations. Positive outcomes include higher school attendance, improved self-regulation, decreased stigma around seeking healthcare, and closer collaboration between health and education professionals. Families have expressed greater trust in the services and experienced less travel burden, while teachers have observed increased student engagement and earlier responses to emerging health and wellbeing needs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No pharmaceutical or industry funding was received in the development or implementation of this project.