

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2023

Research for healthier rural and
regional communities



Introduction

Western Alliance Academic Health Science Centre (Western Alliance) was established in 2014 and incorporated as a registered health promotion charity in 2016. It is Australia's first rural and regionally-focused academic health science centre.

Western Alliance is comprised of 12 member organisations located across the Barwon/Southwest and Grampians regions of western Victoria. The two regions have a combined population of over 660,000 residents or approximately 44% of rural/regional Victoria's population. Members include six regional, sub-regional and local public health services, three private hospitals, a primary health network and two universities.

Western Alliance supports the development of healthier rural and regional communities. This is in recognition of the significantly poorer health outcomes experienced by people living in the Barwon/South West and Grampians regions of Victoria compared to their metropolitan-living counterparts. The challenges that affect the health of people living in western Victoria include distance and major variations in access to healthcare, socio-economic status and infrastructure.

Targeted research strategies and systematic translation efforts spanning health services, academic institutions and regional boundaries advance the delivery of research-based and evidence-informed health care across western Victoria.

The key function of Western Alliance is to support the development of the capability and capacity of our members to conduct research relevant to rural and regional health and to implement research-based and evidence-informed healthcare.

Western Alliance has established important collaborations with leading national and state-based organisations to improve our capacity to support research in our priority themes and platforms. To date, Western Alliance has supported over 30 studies, including seed funding and financial contributions to large NHMRC-funded projects.

"THE KEY FUNCTION OF WESTERN ALLIANCE IS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY OF OUR MEMBERS TO IMPLEMENT RESEARCH-BASED AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED HEALTH CARE."

The Alliance delivers a broad research education program, including funding for multi-year research fellowships. It also provides critical 'on-the-ground' support to members through three health service-embedded Research Translation Coordinators located across the Barwon/Southwest and Grampians regions.

This three year strategic plan is dedicated to enabling research that will solve the key health issues faced by our member organisations.

Professor Warren Payne, Executive Director

OUR TRACK RECORD: WESTERN ALLIANCE FUNDED STUDIES INCLUDE

- Identifying barriers, facilitators and strategies for implementing cardiac tele-rehabilitation to address access inequalities in western Victoria
- What is the prevalence of malnutrition in a small rural health service? Evaluation of a malnutrition screening program
- Let's have a yarn about chronic disease: A collaborative, multidisciplinary, participatory action research approach to addressing Aboriginal health in south-western Victoria
- The Rural Acute Hospital Data Register (RAHDaR)
- Chronic disease, injury and ageing in Western Victoria: opportunities to improve health delivery
- A Post-Hospital Discharge Pharmacist Medication Management Service for High Risk Patients Using Telehealth
- Development of a Grampians small towns cancer strategy
- Developing a best-practice, pre-operative exercise therapy 'prehabilitation' model for patients with prostate, colon and breast cancer in the Grampians region of Victoria
- Whole of systems trial of prevention strategies for childhood obesity: WHO STOPS childhood obesity

People living outside Australia's capital cities experience significant disadvantage in health outcomes and are more likely to engage in behaviours with detrimental effects on their health. People living in rural and regional Victoria live almost two years less than their counterparts in metropolitan Melbourne and this disparity is increasing.

¹Furthermore rural and regional Victorians are 75% more likely to receive a disability pension and 60% more likely to develop mental health problems. They have a 45% higher incidence of unintentional injuries, are 25% more likely to be obese, and record almost 15% higher hospital admissions per capita.

²These statistics indicate the health challenges facing rural and regional Victorians and the health care services working with them to address these inequities. They also highlight the potential for translational research to improve the health of rural and regional communities.

¹Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Life Tables, 2011–2013, 2013–2015 and 2014–2016.

²Victorian Government (2018) Department of Health and Human Services Strategic Plan. Available at: <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201808/DHHS-strategic-plan-20180815.pdf>



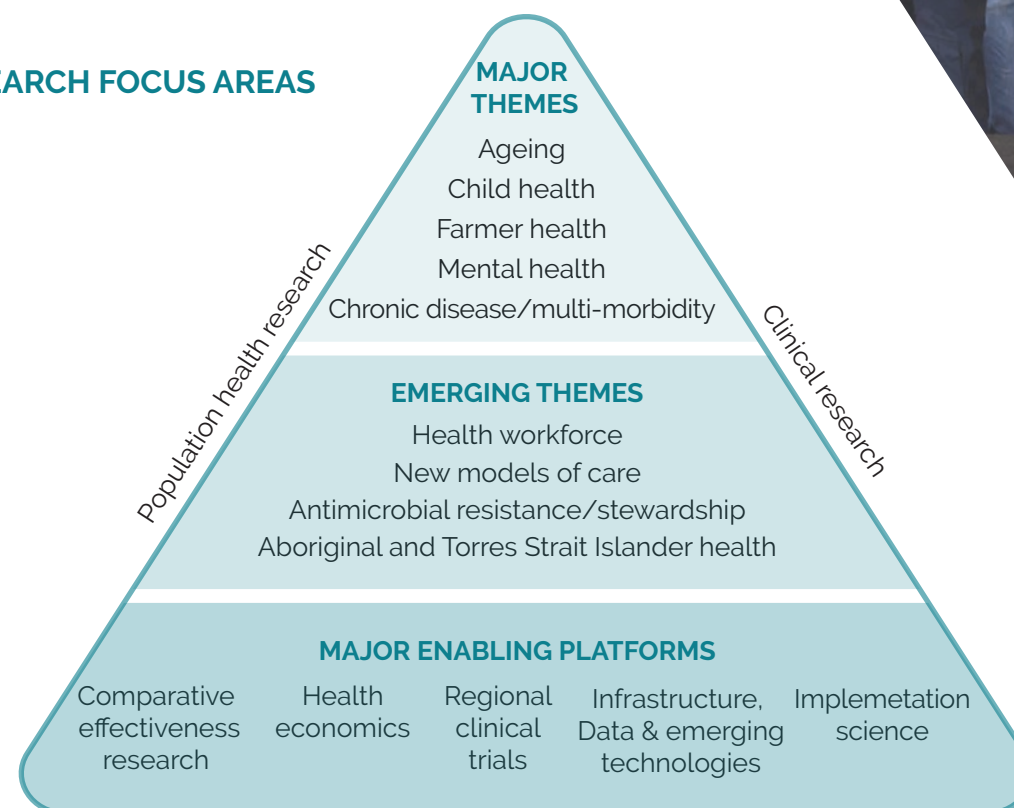
Our Research Focus Areas

UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES

- > Prevention
- > Access to health services
- > Equity
- > Quality, safety & innovation
- > Promoting consumer engagement
- > Collaboration & communication in healthcare
- > Stimulating engagement with others industries & sectors



RESEARCH FOCUS AREAS



Health services research

Our Vision

Healthier rural and regional communities

Western Alliance supports its members to improve the health of their communities through research-based and evidence-informed health care

Our Values

COLLABORATION

Success requires positive relationships and ongoing cooperation between consumers, clinicians, researchers, health services, universities and other organisations at all stages of the translational research continuum

AGILITY AND UTILITY

Research must lead to practical changes that improve health outcomes for rural and regional consumers and communities. This requires timely responses to research questions and efficient dissemination and implementation of solutions

RESPECT

Consumers, clinicians from all disciplines and researchers at all career stages can make valuable contributions to improving health outcomes through research

EQUITY

Fair local access by rural and regional communities to research-enabled quality health care

Our Mission

We foster relationships between organisations and individuals who can influence rural and regional health outcomes and research.

We build capability of rural and regional health practitioners, researchers and consumers, enabling them to contribute to and benefit from health research.

We prioritise rural and regional health problems and fund rural and regional health research teams to investigate, generate evidence and implement solutions.

We support development of nationally relevant models of rural and regional health research.

We work to achieve equitable funding for rural and regional health research.



Our Strategic Priorities

OUR GOALS FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

DEVELOP

1

Build rural and regional research culture, capacity and capability

TRANSLATE

2

Facilitate and support high value translational research

SUSTAIN

3

Strengthen the sustainability of the Alliance

GROW

4

Position the Alliance to promote and develop rural and regional health and medical research



Western Alliance is uniquely positioned to demonstrate the ways in which rural and regionally focused research can improve the health of local communities. Western Alliance is an enabler of, and contributor to, a journey that starts with consumer and health practitioner-informed identification of health and healthcare issues. These are converted into high quality research hypotheses and translated into

health system outcomes by skilled health research teams working with rural and regional practitioners. By developing and piloting models of research appropriate to the rural and regional communities it serves, and by communicating, engaging with and advocating for organisations in other regions to support their own local efforts, Western Alliance aspires to improve the health of rural and regional Victorians.

The strategic priorities identified by Western Alliance in its 2020-23 plan are targeted to building the research culture of its health service members while promoting and developing rural and regional health and medical research more broadly. Western Alliance will achieve its strategic goals through the following priorities.

Our priorities for the next three years

1 DEVELOP

Build rural and regional research culture, capacity and capability

- 1.1** Deliver a region-wide translational research education program
- 1.2** Review membership model and facilitate membership by all eligible organisations
- 1.3** Train health practitioners and consumers in research co-design and consumer engagement
- 1.4** Where requested, support other regions to develop statewide rural and regional research capacity and capability building initiatives

2 TRANSLATE

Facilitate and support high value translational research

- 2.1** Validate priority research themes and consolidate processes for defining priority research topics and questions
- 2.2** Target funding to priority health research themes and questions that have potential to improve rural and regional practice and health outcomes
- 2.3** Develop practical systems, processes and resources to support high value translational research (including program evaluation) in the region, interfacing with existing health service quality improvement activities
- 2.4** Reduce barriers to conducting research in rural and regional health settings by working to improve consistency, ease of use and clarity of research ethics and governance processes



3 SUSTAIN

Strengthen the Alliance's sustainability

- 3.1** Revise and consolidate organisational governance structures as appropriate
- 3.2** Develop and implement a communication and engagement strategy with a focus on members, consumers and communities
- 3.3** Establish an evaluation framework and continuously evaluate performance
- 3.4** Prepare to respond to future national opportunities

4 GROW

Position the Alliance to promote and develop rural and regional health and medical research

- 4.1** Strengthen alignment with rural and regional health priorities
- 4.2** Advocate for equitable state and national support for regional and rural translational research
- 4.3** Strengthen links with Victorian Advanced Health Research & Translation Centres (AHRTCs) and other relevant state, national and international translational research entities
- 4.4** Prepare to respond to future national opportunities



Our Commitment

Over the next three years we will demonstrate our commitment to healthier rural and regional communities by:



DEVELOP

Attracting broad membership across western Victoria

Building research literacy across our membership

Supporting the development of organisational research plans/frameworks for Alliance members

Assisting our members to navigate research ethics and governance processes

Embedding Research Translation Coordinators as a resource for our regional and rural health services

Developing and delivering research education and training resources – including on-line modules for flexible delivery and greater access

Designing and implementing research funding programs that meet the needs of regional and rural health practitioner researchers and their communities, including codesigned research that helps to overcome the health inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

TRANSLATE

Achieving recognition of Western Alliance as an authority and resource for rural and regional health research

Adopting a governance structure that supports inclusive membership

Promoting research as core business for rural and regional health services

Developing and advocating for career pathways for clinician-researchers in rural and regional health services

Advocating for state and national research ethics and governance policies and procedures that take into account the needs of rural and regional health services

SUSTAIN

Supporting health service quality improvement activities through application of research principles

Bringing Alliance members together in networked and collaborative research projects aligned with our key themes and priorities

Developing a series of projects that strengthen research collaboration between members

Supporting one or more flagship projects that bring our partners together for the benefit of rural and regional health

Engaging the community in the design and implementation of research that improves the health of the community

GROW

Establishing links with AHRTC's and other translation-focused research centres and entities at a state, national and international level

Developing and demonstrating established networks and collaborations

Develop stronger links with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across western Victoria