

## THE AUSTRALIAN

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# Seeking regional health workers

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By **JILL ROWBOTHAM**, HIGHER EDUCATION WRITER

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Spending to build up the health workforce in regional, rural and remote areas, most recently in the federal budget's \$550 million Stronger Rural Health Strategy, is being backed by concerted efforts to identify the make-or-break issues for graduates deciding whether to try a career outside major centres and whether to stick with it.

Early data from a survey conducted as part of the Nursing and Allied Health Graduate Outcome Tracking study shows while final-year students in nursing and allied health (that is, excluding doctors, nurses and dentists) wanted employment in a capital or major urban centre in their first year of work, an increasing proportion intend to try jobs farther afield in regional areas five or 10 years after graduation.

The study, a collaboration between Monash University and the University of Newcastle that began early last year, aims to identify the influence of factors such as students' rural background, clinical placement locations while at university and their earliest intentions to practice in metropolitan or other settings.

Other preliminary data showed fewer graduating students from a rural background intended to practice in a metropolitan setting than non-rural background students, but that again, across time, intention to work in a rural area increased for both groups.

"This may represent lifestyle rather than career choices," Monash department of rural health's Susan Waller said.

Dr Waller said one objective of another collaboration, between Monash, Deakin and Melbourne university rural health departments, would be to support nursing and allied health

students to undertake clinical placements.

Other recent research by Cath Cosgrave, an academic specialising in rural nursing and allied health workforce at Melbourne's department of rural health, argues for a need to shift the focus of strategies to attract and retain staff.

Dr Cosgrave's findings show that as well as career development opportunities, personal satisfaction and life stage — rather than simply rural background — are the major determinants of turnover.

**JILL ROWBOTHAM, HIGHER EDUCATION REPORTER**

Jill Rowbotham is The Australian's higher education journalist. Previous roles on the newspaper include bureau chief in Perth and Sydney, Opinion and Media editor and deputy editor of The Weekend Australian Mag... [Read more](#)

