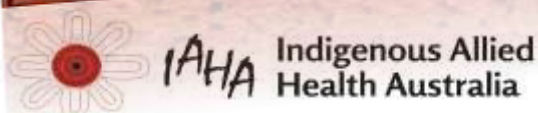


NARN *newsletter*

Dry season, 2026

- ◎ Children developing well
- ◎ Young people and adults growing well & staying strong
- ◎ Older people ageing well in place

From the Leadership Team



Welcome to the Northern Australia Research Network (NARN) newsletter, 2026 dry season edition. This newsletter was collated by our members and highlights some of the fantastic research and practice innovation undertaken by northern Australian researchers.

NARN is a collaborative network of researchers, clinicians, consumers, health managers, health educators, workforce development and policy personnel from northern Australia. Allied health professionals form the majority of the NARN membership with a range of other members who contribute to delivery of disability, rehabilitation and lifestyle services.

NARN works in partnership with Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), recognising and acknowledging the cultural and diverse needs, beliefs, practices and authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in northern Australia. Our aim is to conduct research to inform delivery of culturally responsive and safe, disability, rehabilitation and lifestyle services in regional, rural and remote northern Australia. We apply a strength-based approach to research to support children developing well, young people growing up well, adults staying strong and older people ageing well in place within family and community.

The activities within the NARN Strategic Plan are strength-based and solution-focused. They are based on authentic community engagement and the IAHA cultural responsiveness framework, and aim to strengthen allied health services and providers. The key strategies are Connect, Co-create, Strengthen, Translate and Sustain.

Membership to NARN is free and a great way to connect with other professionals across who are interested in improving access and quality of allied health services across northern Australia. You can sign up here: [Membership | JCU Centre for Rural & Remote Health](#)

Please feel free to share this newsletter amongst your networks and contact us with stories on your research in northern Australia.

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Contact Us



**Northern Australia
Research Network**



We acknowledge Australian Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People as the first inhabitants of the nation, and acknowledge Traditional Owners of the lands and water where we live, learn and work.





Training clinical supervisors in the NT



NARN newsletter

Dry season, 2026

What we learned while training clinical supervisors in the Northern Territory

In our health system, high-quality clinical supervision isn't a luxury - it's a workforce necessity. Every day, we rely on clinical supervisors to support learners, uphold safe practice, and nurture the next generation of health professionals. Yet we often overlook that supervision itself is a specialised skill set, one that requires deliberate development over time. That's why we set out to understand not just whether supervision training is useful, but how supervisors translate that learning into their day-to-day work.

To explore this, we conducted a research study with 17 supervisors across medicine, nursing and allied health in the Northern Territory. Three months after they completed supervision training, we sat down with each of them for in-depth interviews. Our goal was simple: to hear, in their own words, how the training had shaped their supervisory practice. We analysed these conversations thematically, looking for patterns that could help us strengthen the supervision workforce more broadly.

What we found highlighted the diversity of our workforce and the different ways supervisors grow. Five themes emerged: the influence of prior work and supervision experience; the conditions in which supervision occurs; the teaching approaches supervisors adopt; the professional learning opportunities available to them; and the ways they translate new knowledge into practice.

What particularly stood out was how differently supervisors engaged with the same training depending on where they were in their supervisory journey. Novice supervisors told us the training gave them foundational frameworks - a structure they could lean on as they built confidence. Those with some experience said the training offered a shared language and rationale, helping them bring coherence to what they were already doing. Highly experienced supervisors described the training as affirming, strengthening practices they had refined over years.

These insights reinforce that developing a capable supervision workforce requires more than one-off training events. We need ongoing, flexible professional learning and communities of practice that allow supervisors to continue refining their craft. When we invest in supervisors at every stage of their journey, we strengthen not only individual capability but the safety, quality and sustainability of our entire health workforce.

By Melissa (Melba) Ridd, Lecturer in Remote Health (Allied Health), and Leigh Moore, Senior Lecturer in Rural and Remote Health

Research Capacity Building in regional, rural and remote Australia: A scoping review collaboration

We are currently undertaking a scoping review to map and describe research capacity building (RCB) initiatives for health professionals working in regional, rural and remote Australia. Research capacity is increasingly recognised as critical to strengthening health services, supporting workforce retention, and ensuring that care delivered in rural and remote settings is informed by locally relevant evidence. However, there has been no comprehensive synthesis of how research capacity is currently being developed and supported across the Australian non-metropolitan health workforce.

This review aims to identify the types and characteristics of initiatives that support clinicians to engage in research, including training programs, mentoring models, partnerships, and organisational supports. It will also explore the factors influencing their implementation and impact. By synthesising both peer-reviewed and grey literature, the project will provide the first overview of contemporary RCB activity across regional, rural and remote Australia, and identify gaps and opportunities for future investment.

This work is a collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of researchers and clinicians across Australia. The project reflects NARN's commitment to strengthening the allied



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health workforce and supporting research that is responsive to the needs of northern Australian communities.

Findings from the review will inform future policy, workforce development and research support strategies, with the aim of strengthening research engagement among clinicians and improving health outcomes in rural and remote communities. We anticipate publication of the review later in 2026 and look forward to sharing findings with the NARN network.

By Robyn Doney, Academic Research Fellow – Allied Health, Majarlin Kimberley Centre for Remote Health, the University of Notre Dame Australia (Broome campus)

Staying Strong at Home: How Outback Active is Keeping Katherine's Seniors Independent

Outback Active is an innovative telehealth exercise program delivered by Charles Darwin University that is improving the health, independence and wellbeing of older adults in the Katherine region. Designed to address critical service gaps in access to exercise physiology and allied health, the program supports older Territorians to remain active, confident and independent—without the need for frequent travel.

Delivered via telehealth, Outback Active provides individually tailored, supervised exercise sessions, offered in one-on-one and small-group formats. The program targets adults aged 65 years and over, and First Nations people aged 50+, with sessions led by exercise physiologists and scientists and supported by trained university students. Participants work towards personal health goals, building strength, maintaining mobility, and reducing their risk of falls, injury and hospitalisation through a strong preventative health approach.

Outback Active has been co-designed with the Katherine community and responds directly to local need. Limited access to exercise physiology services in the region

prompted the development of a flexible delivery model combining telehealth with opportunities for group participation to strengthen social connection. Tailored IT support ensures accessibility, helping overcome barriers related to distance, workforce shortages and digital inequity.

Since commencement 62 participants including 12 First Nations clients, have engaged in the program. All participants demonstrated improvement in at least one functional outcome measure, including cardiorespiratory fitness and lower body strength. Participants also reported improvements in wellbeing, with reductions in indicators of anxiety and depression. Importantly, the majority reported they were highly likely to continue exercising, demonstrating sustained behaviour change.

The program is underpinned by strong collaboration with general practitioners, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and non-government providers, supporting referral pathways and connections to broader health and wellbeing services. To date, Outback Active has delivered over 400 occasions of service and engaged extensively with local stakeholders, including the Katherine Seniors Group, Wurli Wurlijang Health Service, Bauhinia Health and Kalano Community Association.

Outback Active also delivers significant workforce benefits through a multidisciplinary, work-integrated learning model, involving students from Exercise and Sport Science, Social Work, Nutrition, Occupational Therapy and Health Science. Two graduates are now employed within the program, strengthening local capacity.

Funded through the NT PHN and now embedded within CDU's Health Hub, Outback Active represents a sustainable, scalable model of preventative, community-engaged care.

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By Professor Kim Caudwell, Associate Dean Research and Research Training, Faculty of Health, Charles Darwin University

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Allied Health Co-Workers: A Possible Role in Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Well-Being (Publication)

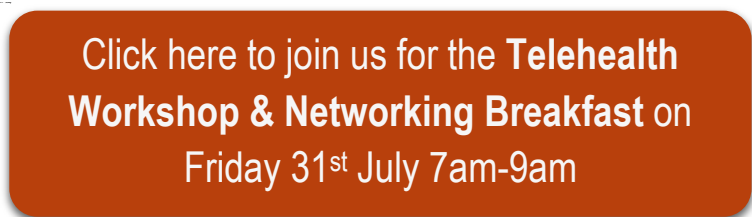
A recently published commentary by members of the NARN leadership team, argues that the existing Allied Health Assistant role does not meet local First Nations community and health service needs. We propose the creation of a new professional role, the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Allied Health Co-Worker (AHCW), to bridge critical gaps in healthcare delivery within remote Australian communities.

The AHCW would combine clinical support tasks with essential cultural brokerage and leadership, with the aim to improve access, engagement and culturally safe care. *“the cultural knowledge, cultural safety, and community trust that AHCW would bring to their practice... provide a holistic solution to improving access and quality of services”.*

The commentary highlights the need for formal recognition, appropriate remuneration, clear training pathways, and supportive models of care that value shared decision-making between clinicians and AHCWs. With strong examples from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the authors call for a national strategic plan to embed AHCWs into health and disability systems, emphasising that this role represents a transformative opportunity to strengthen culturally responsive, community-led allied health services across northern Australia.

*By Dr Alice Cairns, Senior Research Fellow,
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Cairns, A., Stothers, K., Gibson, P., Debenham, J., Topp, S., Campbell, N., Toll, L., Malcolm, H., & Stephen, J. (2025). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Allied Health Co-Workers: A Possible Role in Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Well-Being. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 33(5), e70096. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.70096>



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