

Wagga Wagga Rural Medical School

A generational investment into regional doctors



**Delivered by The Hon.
Michael McCormack MP
Federal Member for Riverina**

April 2025



The fight to secure a



A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: *A concept impression of the UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre.*

“HEALTH is so important. It is for most people the No. 1 priority. That is understandable. Without good health, you have nothing.”

These were my words in my inaugural address to the House of Representatives on 21 October 2010. I have risen to speak another 1,659 times since, but have never wavered from the view I expressed in my first speech.

It has long been known there is a rural doctor shortage. But how best to fix the problem? I have long held the belief the answer lay in training young doctors from start to finish in the regions.

Rural medicine is unique. It has its own challenges with the tyranny of distance being one, as well as the types of injury which afflict country patients as opposed, generally, to those who live in big cities ... such as snakebites and severe road trauma.

Country doctors have to be adept to all manner of cases and causes, unlike their city counterparts for whom the average day is mostly a lot less diverse and

for whom other professional medical assistance is readily at hand.

Clinical schools – and the University of New South Wales has had one operating out of Wagga Wagga since 1999 – have been good, but their success at producing the requisite number of annual doctors to fill shortfalls has been limited.

On 4 August 2014, a stand-alone, purpose-built clinical school building, under the auspices of Notre Dame University, was officially opened on the grounds of Calvary Health Care Riverina. This new building was part of a project funded by the former Federal Coalition Government under a Rural Clinical Schools funding grant.

One of the reasons I believe the Rural Medical School model outshines the clinical schools’ ability to solve the doctor shortage is that the whole course is done regionally. With the clinical schools, students go to metropolitan campuses and hospitals during the latter stages of their course and often remain there when they obtain their degree.

An enduring initiative



Graduates trained all the way through at Rural Medical Schools are likely, in three quarters of cases, to stay in country areas once they get their degree.

My push to secure a Rural Medical School, specifically for Wagga Wagga, but also a network of schools, began early in my Parliamentary career.

Having established in 2011 the Rural Medical School Implementation Committee, with Dr Nick Stephenson as chair; Professor Gerard Carroll, Associate Professor Adrian van der Rijt, Professor Graeme Richardson, Associate Professor Richard Harrison, Dr Louis Baggio, former Member for Riverina Kay Hull and former State Member for Wagga Wagga Daryl Maguire (succeeded by current Member for Wagga Wagga Dr Joe McGirr on the committee in June 2019), we set about to convert the clinical school into something bigger and better.

I took this vision to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull after he offered me \$100 million towards any project of my choosing the day I became Deputy Prime Minister on 26 February 2018.

We went back and forth, debating the merits of the proposal. Prime Minister Turnbull insisted I go away to have a further think about the offer — but I already had. I had the costings, the medical school locations and how such a scheme would work. It just needed the OK from the Prime Minister.

continued...



BIG NEWS: *Announcing a dedicated UNSW medical school for Wagga Wagga on 16 May 2018.*



UNDER CONSTRUCTION: *The UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre in April 2024, having reached the highest point of its construction. Construction of the project was undertaken by Australian-owned family business Lipman.*

It was not until I made it clear that it was the position of the National Party this scheme was a non-negotiable that the Prime Minister agreed to fund the network; and thus began something quite special you see today in the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital Precinct and elsewhere in New South Wales and Victoria.

What followed was vociferous criticism from the Australian Medical Association, the Australian Medical Students' Association Rural Health and others.

I stand by my steadfast view that the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network will go a long way to enabling more rural doctors.

My doggedness in the face of pushback in the highest office in the land and subsequent cries of “you’re wrong” from people in high medical places will, I am sure, lead to better outcomes for regional people and it is them — after all — I care about most.

Securing funding for the network was a huge win for regional communities and, from that moment onwards, work was under way to establish the scheme.

Michael McCormack

**The Hon. Michael McCormack MP
Federal Member for Riverina
Shadow Minister for International
Development and the Pacific**

They said we couldn't, shouldn't build this

POLITICS isn't about doing what the media and vested interest groups command. It's about standing up and fighting for what is right for the local community and nation. The below snippets are indicative of just some of the vehement criticism the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network received. Had we given up advocating for a better future, Wagga Wagga wouldn't have received the once-in-a-generation investment into establishing its own medical school.

ABC News, 19 April 2018

Medical community warns against Nationals' 'Impassioned' push for regional medical schools

By political reporter Kathleen Ferguson
Government and Politics

Thu 19 Apr 2018 at 8:48pm



The medical community is calling for a rethink on building a

Acting Prime Minister Michael McCormack's call to establish a regional medical school to

But the National leader's proposal has prompted warnings from the medical community who say an oversupply of training placements.

Key points:

- Michael McCormack's call to establish a regional medical school has been opposed by the medical community

The Sydney Morning Herald

News Analysis

It was published 2 years ago

OPINION

Nationals prescription for rural health care is wrong

Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack is right about one thing – we need more training for doctors in the bush. What he's not right about is the stage at which this need arises. We need more rural generalists and specialist training, but not more medical students.

Every single location proposed by Christine Sturt and La Trobe universities for the Murray-Darling Medical School already trains medical students, and in several cases trains students from across their own universality.



The Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 2018

The Daily Advertiser

NEWS > RIVERINA

'Med school a waste of cash'

WAGGA

Med school 'waste of cash' with 'no real need'

New campus attracts criticism

graduation (down from 1000 in 2013). It would have 1000 in Wagga, Riverina and Orange, and would be the first graduate world

The Daily Advertiser, 8 August 2013

newsGP

Students say no to more Australian medical schools

Greater numbers of medical schools will increase pressure on existing students and will not tackle the real cause of the rural doctor shortage, the President of the Australian Medical Students' Association told newsGP.



http://www.newsGP.com.au/2018/04/19/medical-students-say-no-to-more-australian-medical-schools/

newsGP, 21 May 2018

NEWS

Medical school stoush

HEALTH

Wagga Wagga (ABC News) - The Murray-Darling Medical School proposal has sparked a stoush between the medical community and the government. The proposal is to build a new medical school in Wagga Wagga, Riverina and Orange, and would be the first graduate world



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The Daily Advertiser, 30 March 2016

Five medical school programs

IN TOTAL, \$95.4 million was secured to establish five medical school programs across six locations in the Murray-Darling Basin.

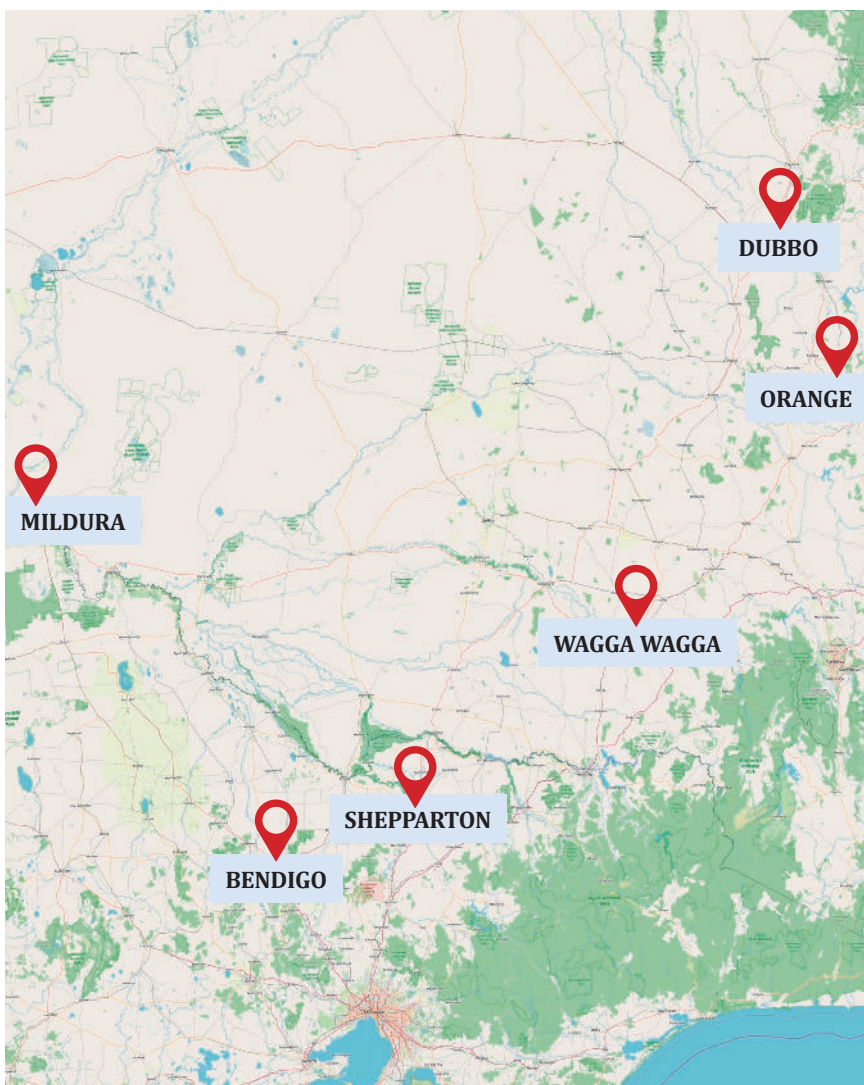
The former Coalition Government worked in close collaboration with universities across Australia. We established medical school programs in:

- Bendigo and Mildura with Monash University;
- Dubbo with the University of Sydney;
- Orange with Charles Sturt University and Western Sydney University;
- Shepparton with the University of Melbourne, including a pathway for La Trobe University students; and

- Wagga Wagga with the University of New South Wales.

These schools don't just benefit the towns and cities in which they are located, but also make a remarkable difference to the more than 20 regional and rural communities in the surrounding areas at which medical students undertake placements.

I'm very proud to say each one of these schools is now in operation and are training students from start to finish in regional Australia.



s established across the basin



UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre

THREE years after development approval was granted, the University New South Wales's new Biomedical Sciences Centre has been completed and has opened its doors to students as a Rural Medical School.

A remarkable addition to Wagga Wagga's hospital precinct, the new medical school provides state-of-the-art facilities and a strategic partnership with the Murrumbidgee Local Health District to support the training of medical professionals.

The school will produce doctors not just for Wagga Wagga but will boost regional health provision for surrounding towns including Coolamon, Cootamundra, Gundagai, Junee, Lockhart, Temora, Tumbarumba, Tumut and beyond ... making it easier to see a General Practitioner when you need one.

Facility facts

- A total value of \$26 million, including \$21 million of Federal Government funding from the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network.
- About 100 medical students in total, from their first to sixth year, will study at the centre at any one point in time.
- The first cohort of 30 first-year students commenced studies at the facility in February 2025.
- State-of-the-art facilities include:
 - Specialised science laboratories;
 - High-tech simulation and research facilities;
 - A lecture theatre;
 - Tutorial rooms; and
 - On-site parking.



STATE OF THE ART: *With Associate Professor Rashid Hashmi inspecting the lecture theatre.*

Building on a rich history



DEPENDABLE ASSET: *Harvey House has served Wagga Wagga's medical sector since 1936.*

THE new UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre builds upon more than 20 years of commitment to regional and rural medical student training in Wagga Wagga by UNSW.

Originally built in 1936 as a nurses' home, Harvey House has long and faithfully served the local community and medical students undertaking clinical training in the Wagga Wagga region.

Indeed, it was 2000 when Harvey House officially welcomed its first students as part of UNSW's Rural Clinical School, the first rural-based clinical school in Australia. This came about through an agreement with the Federal Government which stipulated 25 per cent of undergraduate medical students must spend half their clinical training in a rural or regional centre.

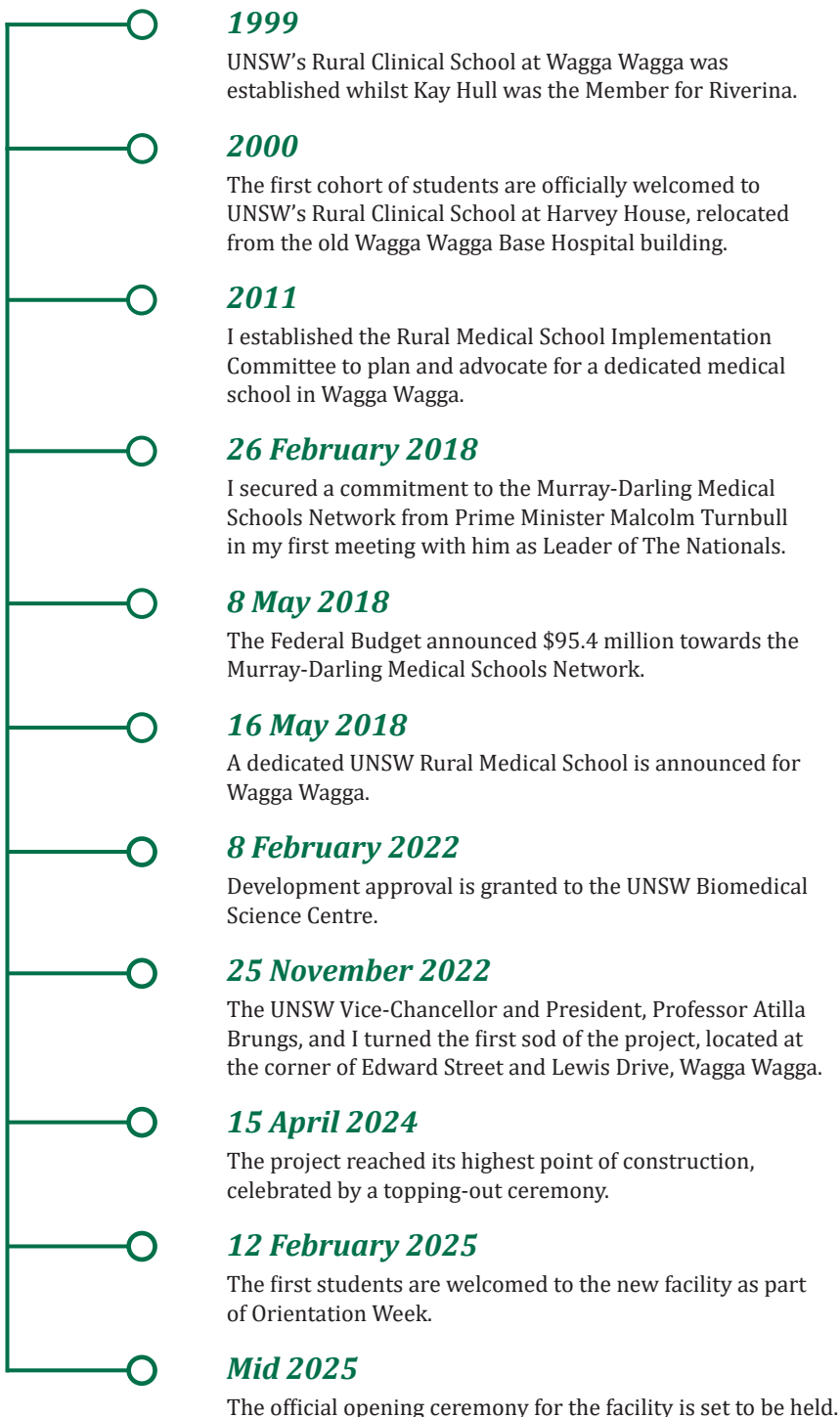
It was this bold and novel initiative by the Howard Coalition Government

which has been vital in opening medical students to the experience of practise in country areas and in encouraging more graduates to pursue a career in regional health. Likewise, the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network, established whilst I was Deputy Prime Minister, builds and expands upon this philosophy and reiterates the Coalition's commitment to regional Australia.

UNSW's new Biomedical Sciences Centre will make an enormous difference in supporting students undertaking their studies by utilising cutting-edge and purpose-built facilities.

I am very proud to have championed this vision and delivered facilities, in Wagga Wagga and elsewhere in the Murray-Darling Basin, which will further entrench the deep ties universities such as UNSW have to our communities.

UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre project timeline





MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT: *With Associate Professor John Preddy and Professor Anthony Kelleher at the announcement of a dedicated medical school for Wagga Wagga.*



BREAKING GROUND: *Marking the start of construction with the Vice-Chancellor and President of UNSW, Professor Attila Brungs.*



CONVENIENT LOCATION: *The site of the medical school before construction.*

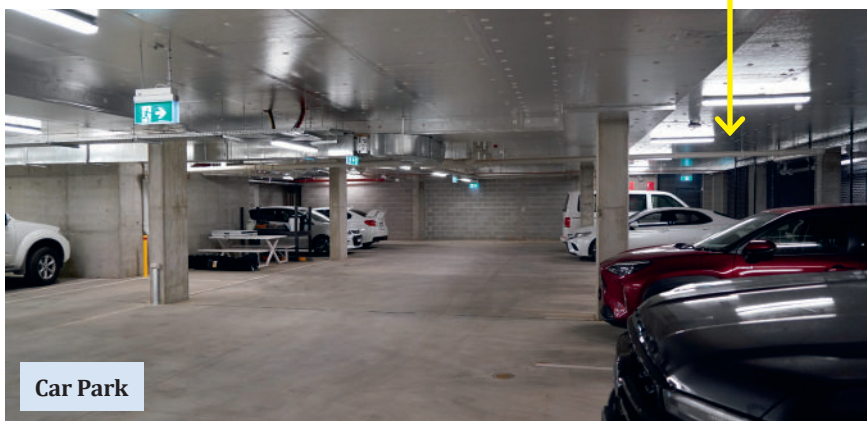
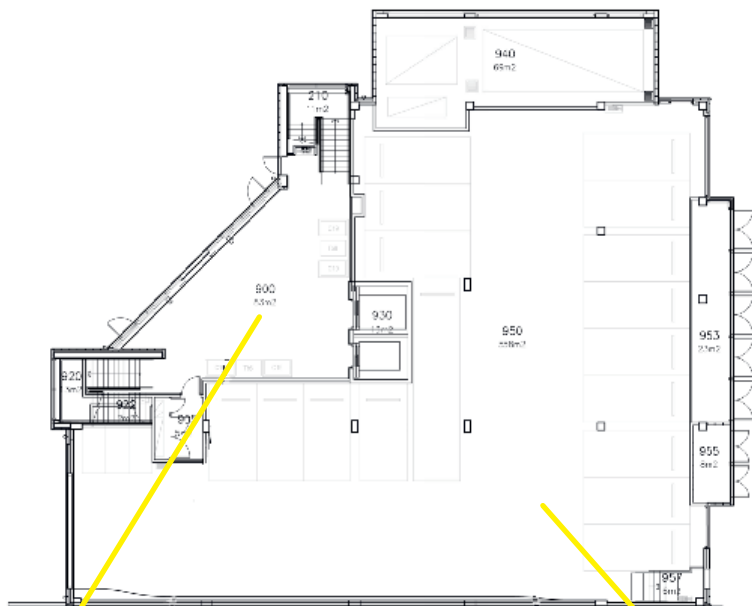


TOPPING OUT 2024: *Celebrating the construction's peak with students and stakeholders.*

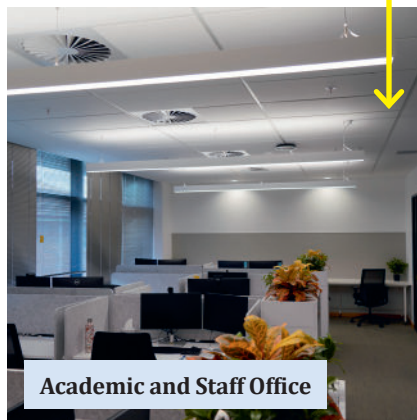
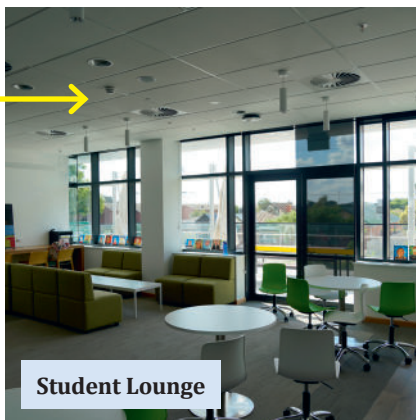
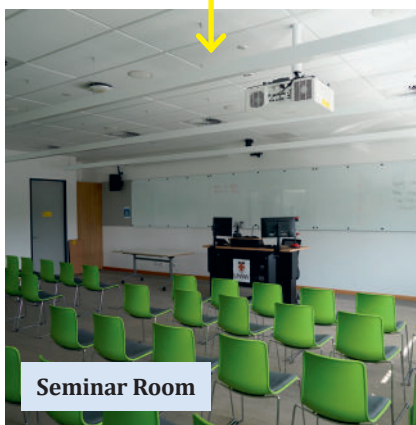
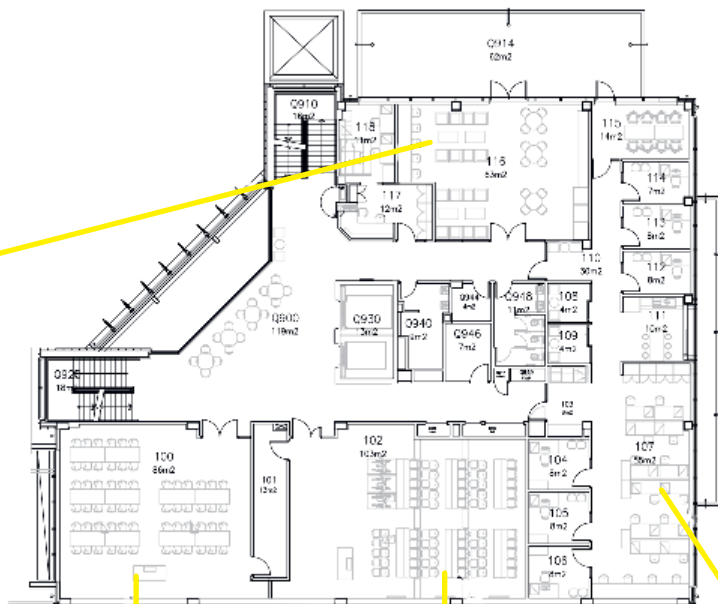


EXCITED STUDENTS: *The first cohort of new students tour the newly completed facility.*

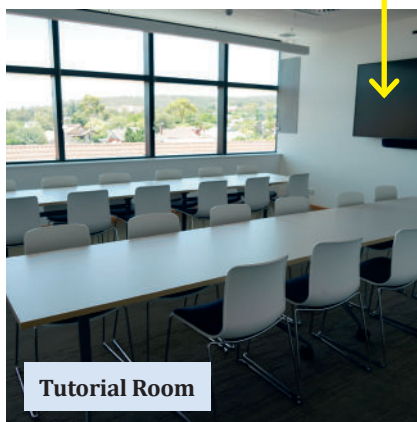
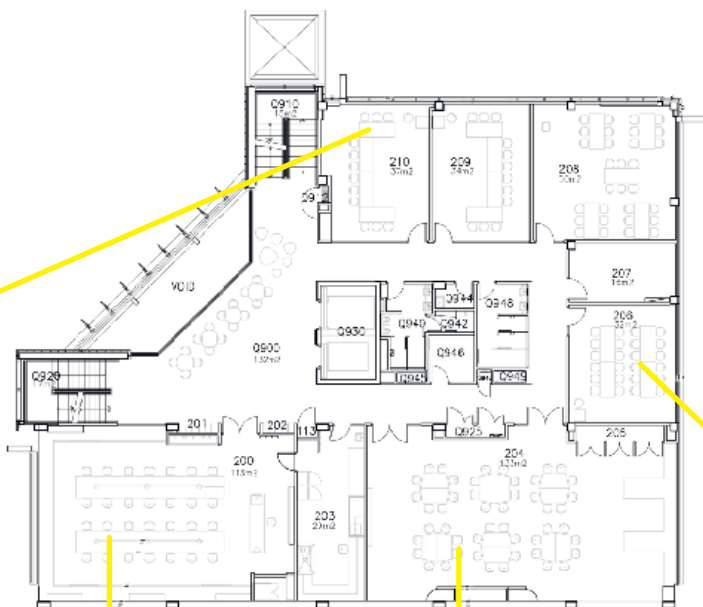
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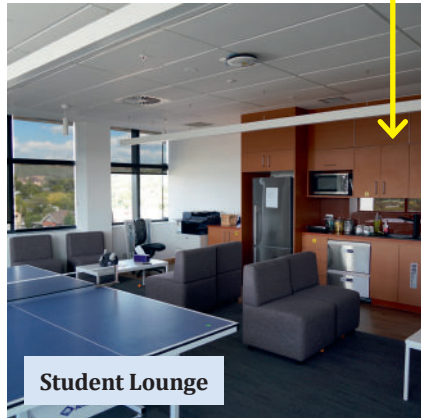
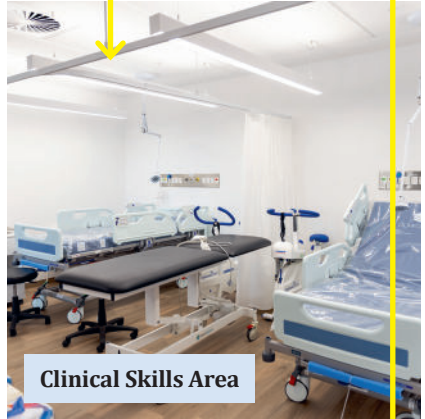
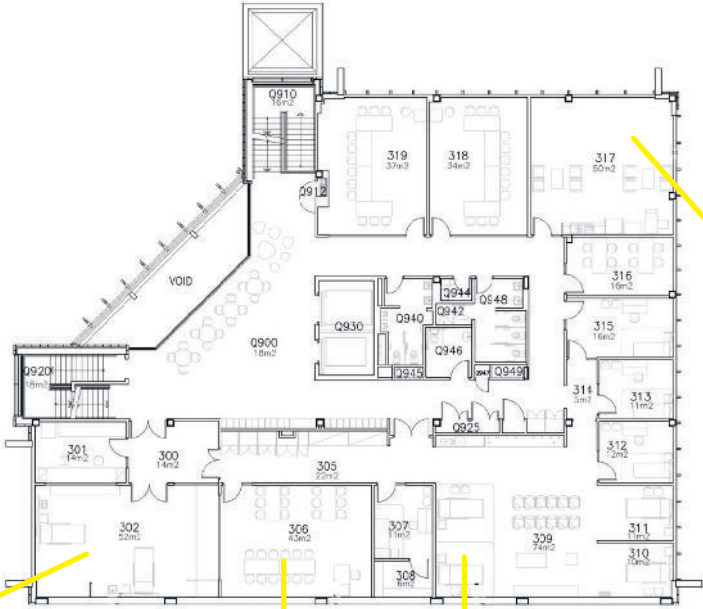
FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR





EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP: *Wagga Wagga respiratory physician Professor Tara Mackenzie serves as Head of School of Clinical Medicine (Rural) at UNSW and oversees the medical school.*

Professor Tara Mackenzie

THE new state-of-the-art UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre in Wagga Wagga is a transformative addition to the region, bringing significant benefits to the Riverina community. By offering world-class education close to home, the campus aims to encourage local students to stay within their community. This fosters a sense of belonging and reduces financial barriers associated with moving away for higher education while increasing the chance of students staying locally after graduating.

The building is designed with flexible tutorial rooms, specialised science laboratories and scenario rooms, ensuring a cutting-edge learning environment. This not only supports the academic growth of students but also addresses the critical need for medical professionals in rural and regional areas. Graduates trained locally are more likely to remain and practise in their communities, contributing to the region's healthcare system and overall well-being.

Additionally, the UNSW team is committed to strengthening ties with local high schools. By creating pathways for high school students to engage with the university through open days, information evenings and campus visits, the centre inspires younger generations to consider a career in medicine. This collaboration ensures a seamless transition from secondary to tertiary education, nurturing a pipeline of skilled professionals dedicated to serving their local area.

Overall, the UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre represents a significant step forward in regional education and healthcare, promoting local talent and fostering a brighter future for the Riverina community. At the end of the day, this UNSW building and this program is all about them.

– Professor Tara Mackenzie is the Associate Dean and Head of School of Clinical Medicine (Rural).



EFFORTS BEAR FRUITS: *Inspecting the new facility with Wagga Wagga cardiologist Professor Gerard Carroll AM, who has been involved in the Rural Medical School Implementation Committee from the start and now sits as Co-Chair of the Oversight Council.*

Professor Gerard Carroll AM

VARIOUS models were explored by the Riverina Rural Medical School Implementation Committee from a combination of local politicians and key senior clinicians, chaired by Doctor Nicholas Stephenson AM.

Mr Michael McCormack, the Federal Nationals' Member and former Deputy Prime Minister, was a foundation member and championed the project as part of implementation of the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network. This resulted in the establishment of the UNSW Rural Medical School in 2021, based in Wagga Wagga and serving the whole of the Murrumbidgee and Murray Basin surrounding areas.

The development of the Biomedical Sciences Building at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, funded by more than \$20 million in Federal grants, marked a significant milestone in this endeavour. This building now serves as the headquarters of the Rural Medical School.

Local governance of this exciting expansion is overseen by the UNSW

Rural Medical School Oversight Council, co-chaired by Professor Tony O'Sullivan and myself, providing strategic support to Professor Tara Mackenzie who is the Associate Dean and Head of School of Clinical Medicine (Rural). This new Rural Medical School has doubled the number of medical students who are enrolled in UNSW studying out of Wagga Wagga and surrounds, contributing to a growing number of medical professionals trained in rural settings.

The UNSW Rural Medical School is poised to further enhance the region's capacity to attract and retain general practitioners and specialists, helping to meet the ongoing healthcare needs of rural and regional areas.

– Professor Gerard Carroll AM is a practising consultant physician and cardiologist, living in Wagga Wagga for 34 years and is the long-term Director of Cardiac Services at both Wagga Wagga Cardiac Catheter Laboratories – the I-MED lab at Calvary and the public lab at Wagga Wagga Base.



SUPPORTIVE FROM THE START: *Wagga Wagga radiologist Dr Nick Stephenson AM was the Chair of the Rural Medical School Implementation Committee.*

Doctor Nick Stephenson AM

THE UNSW Riverina Medical School in Wagga Wagga is a generational game changer, as are all the Murray-Darling Rural Medical Schools. Each school is training medical students rurally, so most will choose to live and work as rural doctors and will go on to further enhance and improve health rural health education and training.

It was a long and arduous journey to establish the medical school, but it was well worth it. It fills me with great pride to see the new UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre standing tall beside the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. The medical school and its new building would not have happened without Michael McCormack and he deserves every accolade for what he did.

As a radiologist in Wagga Wagga since 1996, I have seen Wagga Wagga's health services change significantly for the better over the years. The Wagga Wagga Hospital Redevelopment as well

as the new medical school entrenches Wagga Wagga as a first-class leader in regional health care. Not only are we a hub in southern New South Wales for treatment and care, but now also for training medical professionals.

It is fantastic the medical school is now open and students, both local as well as from other areas, can undertake their training here. Not only is the facility allowing locals to pursue a career in medicine, when they otherwise may not have been able to move elsewhere to do so, but it is also exposing students from metropolitan areas to Wagga Wagga, and other rural areas, to show them just how rewarding and exciting a career in medicine outside of the big cities can be.

Congratulations and thank you, Michael, for championing this cause.

- Dr Nick Stephenson AM is a radiologist and has worked for I-MED Radiology in Wagga Wagga since 2001.



NATIONALS' REPRESENTATION DELIVERS: *The Rural Clinical School was first established under former National Party Member for Riverina Kay Hull and evolved into a stand-alone medical school under my representation.*

Kay Hull AO

AFTER the strongest and most persistent advocacy, an extraordinary feat was achieved by Michael McCormack that saw Rural Clinical Schools transformed into high performance Rural Medical Schools.

These medical schools are now focused on delivering rural health professionals into the regions.

The Nationals in Government have been dedicated to delivering outcomes that ensure rural, regional and remote communities are sustainable, thrive and prosper, have equity in services and our producers are respected for all that they provide to the nation.

A true example is in 1998 when the then National Party Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon. John Anderson AC, drove a significant and critical rural health initiative. As a result of undertaking an extensive tour of rural, regional and remote communities to determine the reality of the health services, he recognised the dire lack of available GPs in many of those communities.

At that time, I, as the National Party Member for Riverina and as the former Deputy Mayor of Wagga Wagga, had been highlighting the GP shortage for some time. I was proud to have joined

with Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson to deliver to the Riverina the first of 11 Rural Clinical Schools rolled out across the nation.

These clinical schools have changed the entire method of training for medical students. A key example of this is a curriculum which taught students of the many and varying rural health concerns, including a focus on farm and workplace injuries, established by Professor Mohamed Khadra, the first Director of the UNSW Clinical School in Wagga Wagga.

The Nationals have been committed to ensuring rural, regional and remote communities have the strongest representation possible and have always been passionate in taking the needs of the people to the Federal Parliament for more than 100 years and will never cease to be our strongest advocates.

I commend Michael McCormack for his persistent advocacy which has seen Wagga Wagga's local clinical school evolve into a medical school in its own right.

- Kay Hull AO was the National Party Member for Riverina from 1998 to 2010 and the Deputy Mayor of Wagga Wagga from 1995 to 1998.



FUTURE REGIONAL DOCTOR: *Wagga Wagga local and Phase One medicine student Madeline Ingram's plan to train and practise locally was made possible by the new medical school.*

Student Madeline Ingram

IT IS such a privilege to pursue my dream career in medicine, right here in my hometown of Wagga Wagga.

I have been interested in the medical field from an early age, and whilst growing up I unfortunately saw some of the health issues my parents and grandparents went through. Seeing just how important good regional and rural health services were to my family, it sparked in me a deep interest in the field and a desire to help others in similar circumstances.

That's the great thing about working in rural health — each and every person working in the field makes a real and tangible difference to the lives of regional people, every single day. My mother, Simone Hitchman, is one of those people, working as a medical scientist in the field of histopathology at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. To join her in helping the community means so much to me.

I am so excited the new UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre is now open. Having first commenced my studies at Harvey House, I was closely following the progress of the new medical school and eager to take advantage of its state-of-the-art facilities and amenities. I can attest to school's fantastic resources, excellent staff and the first-class education it provides.

I cannot understate how important it is to be able to complete all of my degree, from first year to sixth year, here in Wagga Wagga. It makes pursuing medicine so much more accessible. I don't have to move to a capital city, pay exorbitant rent and have to juggle working and studying full-time to stay afloat. In contrast, thanks to this medical school, I can continue to live with my family and can focus more of my energy on studying.

– Madeline Ingram is a Wagga Wagga local who is in her second year studying medicine at the UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre.

The Hon. Michael McCormack MP

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