

Health ANSWERS awards grant to support successful school clinic for at risk students

Health ANSWERS has awarded a Quick Wins grant to a Southern NSW Local Health District General Practitioner/Rural Generalist (Paediatrics), Dr Corin Miller, and her team to help expand a successful school-based health and wellbeing clinic based in Eden.

The free Djing.gii Gudjaagalali (Children Stars) School Clinic for students at risk started operating in Eden Marine High School grounds on Fridays during school terms in 2022. It is staffed by GPs with paediatric skills and has provided physical and mental health care for more than 100 students-in-need that they would not have otherwise received.

Before the clinic was opened at the high school, nearly half of these high-risk students had no access to a GP and waiting time for public system paediatricians was up to two years. More than 40% had previously engaged with child protection services.

An early evaluation of the clinic from May 2022 to June 2024, found it had completed 335 consultations of students from Eden Marine High School and five other primary schools in the catchment area. It was able to diagnose a range of issues, develop mental health programs for individuals, deliver treatments, and make referrals or specialist care.

“This is a transformative clinical model designed by and for the community to address serious gaps in early intervention for rural children,” said principal researcher Dr Corin Miller.

“The early evidence in Eden is that it is a very effective approach for high-risk students at a time in their lives when early intervention can have the greatest positive impact. This grant from Health ANSWERS will help us to better understand the impact of the program and share what is working in Eden with other regions, so they can implement a similar approach.”

Health ANSWERS Quick Wins Grants are specifically designed to fund the critical gap — often referred to as the valley of death — between early research with positive results and the practical implementation at scale in real-world clinical settings, according to Health ANSWERS Director Associate Professor Michelle Moscova.

“To achieve meaningful health impacts, we designed Quick Wins grants to fund promising research in our region, like this one in Eden. This research is backed by a team that includes experienced and early career researchers, including clinicians and university researchers to ensure the team has a mix of clinical and academic expertise,” said Associate Professor Moscova.

“Already this grant format has created new collaborations between academics and clinicians, it will build research capabilities and skills of regional researchers, will evaluate what works and how the clinic may be scaled up.”

Health ANSWERS Quick Wins grants have a triple aim: to advance promising pilot projects to the next stage of testing, build collaborations between academics and clinician-researchers, and improve staff capacity to do research across the region.

Health ANSWERS partnership brings together partners from three universities, two health districts, two ambulance services, three primary health networks, a government agency, and consumer organisation across a region that extends across the South-Eastern NSW and ACT.

“The partnership was formed to establish collaborations between health practitioners, hospitals, researchers, and the community,” said Chair of Health ANSWERS Board Ms Margaret Bennett.

“A key part of this effort is to improve the research skills of clinicians working in the Southern region, which is why it is important that the research we fund includes clinician-researchers. The on-the-ground expertise of clinicians is critical to ensure research is relevant and solves real clinical problems.”

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