

Evaluating an Integrated area-based Health System model for children and young people in Out-of-Home Care in rural Victoria

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Access to coordinated and relevant healthcare is challenging in rural Victoria, particularly for children and young people in Out-of-Home Care. In 2019, the Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with Sunraysia Community Health Services, embarked on an aspirational 10-year project to improve health outcomes for children and young people in Out-of-Home Care. The Integrated area-based Health System prescribes a multidisciplinary wrap-around approach, aimed at reducing hospital admissions, improved experiences with safe medication use, and improved health-related quality of life for this cohort of young people. The Rural Health School at La Trobe University is engaged to evaluate this trial in North West Victoria over an initial period of two years, finishing in November 2021, coinciding with the conclusion of phase one of the project. A broad spectrum of qualitative measures will be employed in order to evaluate the project, including system change models and a range of story capturing techniques.

Focus group and conversation-style interviews will elicit stories from a range of stakeholders. Policy makers, senior leaders and healthcare professionals will share their version of the project, its aims, progress, deliverables and opportunity for lasting system reform. Kinship carers of children involved in the project are asked to share their hopes and experiences, particularly about getting access to health services for children in their care.

This study will delve deeper in the stories shared at a critical touchstone, around the one-year mark. Findings thus far will be discussed that have the potential to drive positive system change and inform policy direction, with the aim to deliver high quality, timely and coordinated, multidisciplinary support options to children and young people in Out of Home Care.

Importantly, dialogue will be sought around contextualising impact, critical factors facilitating replicability, and relevance for under serviced population groups in regional and rural areas.