

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: A STRATEGY TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE; THINKING BEYOND THE PLACEMENT

Associate Professor Rob Dawson

Monash Rural Health Gippsland / Gippsland Regional Training Hub
robert.dawson@monash.edu

Health workforce maldistribution across metropolitan versus regional, rural and remote Australia

The lack of doctors outside metropolitan areas in Australia is a well-known and ongoing challenge.

Strategies to address this issue include:

- Selection of students from rural backgrounds into medicine
- Provision of rural placements for medical students
- Provision of prevocational training at rural sites
- Flipping vocational training to occur primarily in rural settings
- Recruitment of international medical graduates to rural health services and rural general practice

Unfortunately despite these interventions, there remains an inequity between metropolitan areas and the rest of Australia. In fact, 'medical migration' of those recruited contributes to this maldistribution of medical workforce.

Importance of developing community connections

The Gippsland Regional Training Hub hosted the 2023 'Rural Training Pathways Congress' centred on the theme 'Rural Health Futures'. The overwhelming recommendation from that event was a need to improve community connections for the healthcare workforce to help with retention. I became aware of whole-of-person allied health recruitment and retention strategy workshops convened by Dr Cath Cosgrave in Gippsland in 2019.

One of the three domains of Dr Cosgrave's retention improvement framework is community/place. This the feeling of being 'settled in' and having a sense of belonging within the local community. Unfortunately the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic intervened in progressing workshop outcomes. Suggested strategies were community education, develop regional collaboration, implement a community connector, adopt a community development approach, and develop attraction, welcoming and social connection strategies.

This led us to explore the question: **What community connection strategies already exist in Gippsland?**

Introducing Nikki and Sandy

FREE SERVICE

Nikki and Sandy are Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Workers from the 'Settlement Engagement & Transition Program' (SETS) at Latrobe Community Health Service.

Speak to the recruitment team at LRH if you are interested in meeting with Nikki and Sandy and they will refer you to Settlement team.

You can also phone Latrobe Community Health Service on 1800 242 696 and ask to speak to Nikki or Sandy or email SETS@lchs.com.au

Community connection services in Gippsland

Investigations found two current services to assist health workers connect with their community.

1. Settlement Engagement and Transition Program (SETS) provided through Latrobe Community Health Service
2. Latrobe Regional Health UK staff welcome pack

Both act independently but overlap. They provide help with:

- Transport
- Orientation to Australian financial systems (e.g. banking)
- Family and social support
- Health and wellbeing
- English language support
- Employment, education and training

Victorian programs providing community connectors

1. Greater Shepparton City Council – **Attract, Connect, Stay**. This program is based on Dr Cosgrave's whole-of-person retention improvement framework.
2. Loddon Mallee Region Health Services - **Connecting the Docs**. Supported by a consortium of health services aiming to attract, recruit and retain medical staff by tailoring pathways for individual medical practitioners.

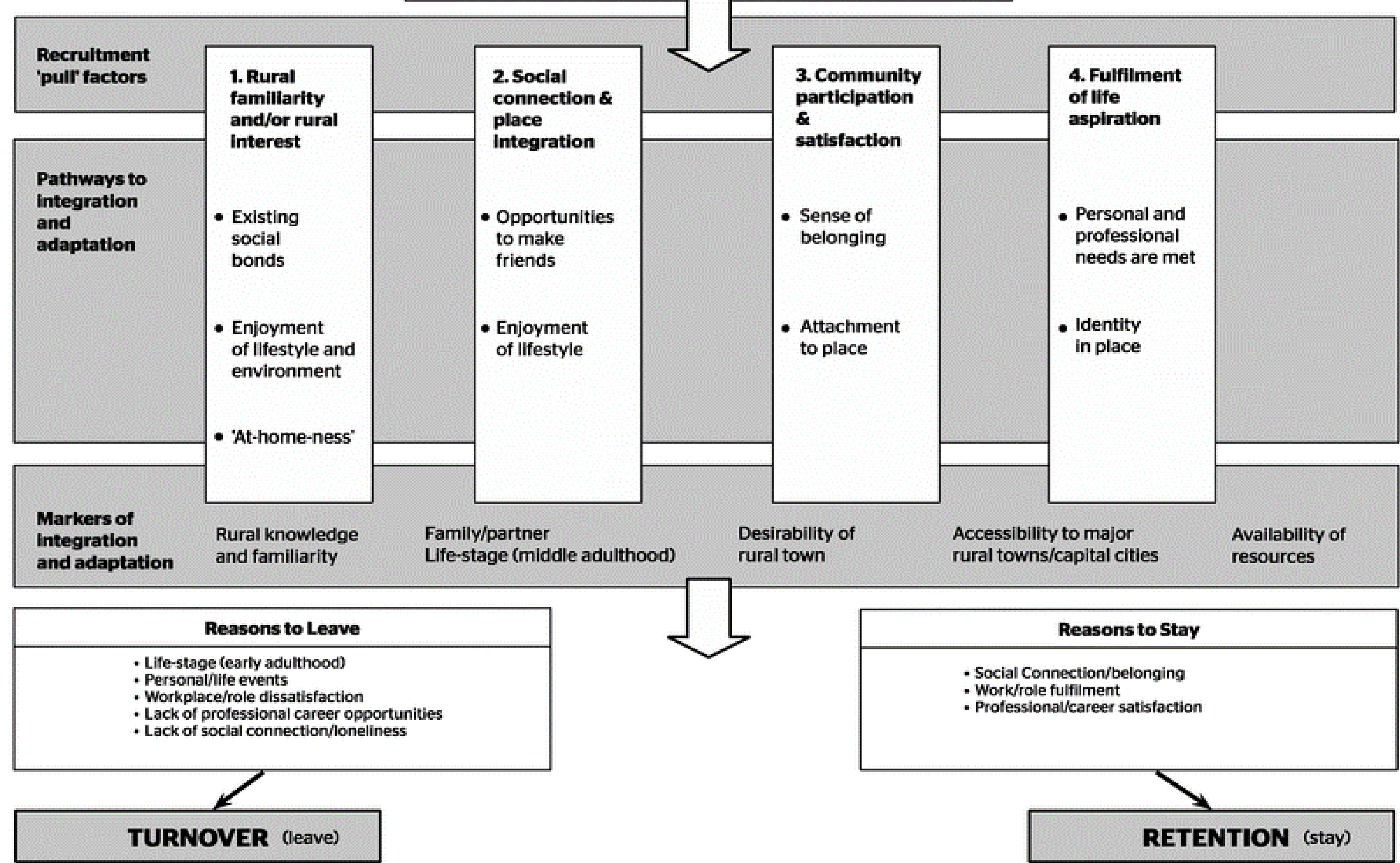


Whole-of-person retention improvement framework. Source: Cosgrave (2019).



RURAL EXPERIENCES

Upbringing Recreation Education Work



Conceptual framework of the social determinants of rural health workforce retention. Source: Cosgrave, Malatzky & Gillespie (2019).

Retention at what cost?

In these times of financial probity, is the cost of a community connector program worthwhile? While a full economic analysis has not been conducted, the indications from both programs support the cost, with increases in workforce recruitment and retention.

Can Gippsland replicate an effective community connector program?

The Regional Training Hub has acted as a conduit to connect Connecting the Docs with the Gippsland Health Services.

CONTACT DETAILS

A/Prof Rob Dawson
MRH Gippsland, 10 Village Avenue, Traralgon West, 3844
Phone: 03 5173 5190
Email: robert.dawson@monash.edu
Web: monash.edu/medicine/rural-health/hubs