



**UNIVERSITY CENTRE
FOR RURAL HEALTH
NORTH COAST**
education research workforce

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Director keen to help address region's health challenges

The newly appointed Director of the University Centre for Rural Health (UCRH), **Professor Ross Bailie**, is committed to working in partnership with other regional organisations to improve the wellbeing of communities in Northern NSW.

"Both the Northern NSW Local Health District and the North Coast Primary Health Network are highly regarded for their work with local communities, many of which face socio-economic disadvantage that has known links to health inequality," Prof Bailie said.

"There is now a greater focus on Aboriginal health, chronic diseases, mental health, ageing, substance misuse and the role of integrated care planning in keeping people out of hospital, or shortening their hospital stay. These initiatives are the way of the future, and we look forward to contributing however we can."

Prof Bailie, a former GP and an experienced public health doctor and researcher, has just taken up the leadership position with the UCRH's 85-strong North Coast team.

UCRH is acknowledged as a regional success story for its work in coordinating placements for medical, nursing and allied health students from a range of universities in local hospitals, GP practices and other clinical settings.

Students undertake clinical work across the Northern Rivers, with many taking up positions in this region after graduation. This work makes a vital contribution to improving health services in this region and in regional areas across Australia.

UCRH researchers have a strong record in investigating rural health issues of importance to both the local area and Australia more widely. They have been recognised with major grants and awards. The UCRH is primarily a collaboration between The University of Sydney, Southern Cross University, the University of Wollongong and the University of Western Sydney. It also works with a range of other universities to support rural health education and research.

The main UCRH campus is in Lismore, with education centres attached to the hospitals in Murwillumbah and Grafton, purpose-built student accommodation in Ballina, and an increasing extension of programs in other towns in the region.

Professor Bailie graduated in medicine and surgery from the University of Cape Town, South Africa in 1983. As well as practicing as a GP he has focused his career on public health.

For almost two decades he worked with the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin and Brisbane, and has extensive knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues. He

leads the NHMRC funded Centre for Research Excellence in Integrated Quality Improvement in Indigenous primary health care.

“As the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare noted in its recent report, Indigenous Australians experience a burden of disease more than twice that of non-Indigenous citizens,” Professor Bailie said.

“While some gains are being made, there is much to be done. It is important to remember that this is not an issue that just affects remote communities, because similar statistics apply to Indigenous residents here on the North Coast. A report produced by the UCRH in 2012 highlighted the difference in health status between Aboriginal and other people in Northern NSW.

“The region also faces important disparities between rural and urban areas, and these have a damaging effect across the whole community. We need to do more as a society to tackle these inequities,” Prof Bailie said.

“Priorities for the region include the increasing importance of chronic or long term illness and mental health, and development of services to meet the health needs of the increasingly large population of aged people in our region.

“I’m looking forward to working with the UCRH team and partner organisations in contributing to real solutions for improving health and health services.

“Prevention of illness requires high quality health care over the whole life course, and commitment of all sectors of society to creating a healthy environment.”

Prof Bailie expressed his appreciation of the role played by senior staff in the leadership of the UCRH prior to his arrival – particularly acknowledging the important ongoing contributions made by Professor Michael Douglas and Professor Megan Passey.

Prof Bailie also paid tribute to his predecessor, Professor Lesley Barclay, noting the particular contribution she has made to maternal and infant health and her strong commitment to improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the North Coast.

“There is no doubt that Lesley and the wider UCRH team have made a tremendous contribution to the education of health care professionals visiting or living in our region, and to enhancing the capacity of local services at both the primary and acute care levels.”

Media information: Linda Pike, UCRH (02) 6620 7231 - Robin Osborne 0409 984 488

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**PO Box 3074, Lismore NSW 2480
Phone: +61 2 6620 7570 Fax: +61 2 6620 7270 Email: reception@ucr.edu.au**