STRONGER RURAL HEALTH STRATEGY
Non-Vocationally Registered Fellowship Support Program

FACTSHEET

Stronger Rural Health Strategy

The Australian Government's Stronger Rural Health Strategy aims to build a sustainable, high quality health workforce that is distributed across the country according to community need particularly in rural and remote communities.

Through changes in Medicare benefits, General Practice (GP) training arrangements and financial incentives, vocationally recognised (VR) GPs and non-vocationally recognised (Non-VR) doctors will bill Medicare according to their level of qualification. This will create a strong incentive for doctors to attain specialist GP qualification and provide communities where non-VR doctors work, particularly regional, rural and remote locations, access to a specialist GP trained to the highest industry standards.

Non-Vocationally Registered Fellowship Support Program

The Non-Vocationally Registered (Non-VR) Fellowship Support Program (FSP) was announced as part of the 2018-19 Stronger Rural Health Strategy: Streamlining General Practice (GP) Training Budget Measure.

The Non-VR FSP will provide a subsidy to assist medical practitioners to gain Fellowship and vocational registration as a specialist general practitioner. The Commonwealth will provide a contribution for participants' training, with additional costs to be funded by participants.

The Non-VR FSP will be administered by the two General Practice (GP) Colleges. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) will deliver the Non-VR FSP through their Practice Experience Program (PEP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) will deliver the Non-VR FSP through their Independent Pathway (IP).

Why is this important?

On 1 July 2018, a new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebate structure for GPs was introduced for non-VR doctors. This new structure means non-VR doctors can claim 80% of the equivalent VR GP item for services. This change was made to better recognise the level of GP expertise.

Some existing Non-VR medical practitioners can claim the full general practice items by participating in an Other Medical Practitioners (OMPs) Program. OMPs participants will be grandfathered for up to five years over which time current arrangements will remain in place. This workforce must attain Fellowship or join a Fellowship program through the Colleges to maintain access to the highest tier MBS items after the grandfathering period. The Non-VR FSP provides a supported pathway to Fellowship through the GP colleges' Fellowship Programs for these doctors

Who will benefit?

New and continuing Non-VR medical practitioners will be supported to achieve VR status in general practice.

Communities across Australia will benefit by having access to a greater number of doctors with specialist general practice qualifications. Patients seeing a VR doctor can feel confident that they are receiving high quality care as their treating doctor will have met the quality standard required by the GP Colleges. The program will ensure there is no disruption to existing communities as doctors accessing the program can undertake their training and attain Fellowship qualifications while continuing to practice and provide services to the Australian community in their existing locations.

When will the initiative commence?

The Non-VR FSP will commence on 1 January 2019.

Program Eligibility

The Non-VR FSP will be administered by the RACGP through their PEP and by ACRRM through their IP. Non-VR medical practitioners interested in applying should refer to the relevant College's website for information on eligibility requirements and how to apply.

Further Information

Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine: https://www.acrrm.org.au/training-towards-fellowship/Non-VR

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners: https://www.racgp.org.au/education/imgs/fellowship-pathways/practice-experience-program