



# Visas for GPs initiative - February 2019

## STRONGER RURAL HEALTH STRATEGY

The Visas for GPs initiative will manage growth in Australia's medical workforce by regulating the number of overseas trained doctors (OTDs) entering Australia to work in the primary healthcare sector through the skilled migration program.

### **Growth in GP numbers**

General Practitioner numbers have increased at a rate three times more than population growth over the past decade. This is due to a surge in supply of locally trained medical graduates and sustained high level supply of OTDs. Without managing this growth, Australia faces a potential oversupply of around 7,000 medical practitioners by 2030<sup>1</sup>. Data shows that the majority of growth in the numbers of medical practitioners has been in well-serviced major capital cities and metropolitan areas rather than rural and remote areas where there is greater need.

### **Directing doctors to areas with the greatest need in Australia, especially in rural, remote and regional areas**

Under the Visas for GPs initiative, the number of OTDs entering the primary healthcare workforce through the skilled migration program will be reduced by about 200 doctors a year, over a period of four years.

The initiative will direct doctors into areas that have lower access to services such as rural, remote and regional areas of Australia. It is not intended to reduce current service provision, but to reduce unnecessary growth in areas that currently have high levels of access to (Medicare) services.

Fewer OTDs in primary healthcare will ease pressure on training places, and give more opportunities to Australian trained medical graduates, whose numbers have also been growing.

### **New requirements for employers sponsoring a visa applicant to work in Australia**

New requirements for employers sponsoring overseas doctors to work in Australia are scheduled to commence on 25 February 2019. All employers nominating a position that will be filled by a doctor who needs a visa to work in the following Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) will be required to obtain certification (a Health Workforce Certificate) from a Rural Workforce Agency (RWA). A Health Workforce Certificate is a letter issued by a RWA confirming the genuine need to fill a primary healthcare position at a given location in Australia by an overseas doctor in the following three occupations;

- General Practitioner (ANZSCO 253111);
- Resident Medical Officer (ANZSCO 253112); and
- Medical Practitioner not elsewhere classified (ANZSCO 253999)

Employers will be required to attach the Health Workforce Certificate to their nomination application for one of the following employer sponsored visas:

- Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS, subclass 482) visa
- Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS, subclass 186) visa; and
- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS, subclass 187) visa.

<sup>1</sup> As per projections from the 2014 Australia's Future Workforce – Doctors report.

**A current Health Workforce Certificate must be provided as part of an employer sponsored visa nomination application for these occupations. Without the Certificate the nomination cannot be approved and the related visa cannot be granted.**

Other medical occupations, for example non-GP specialists, will not require a Health Workforce Certificate.

### **Employers need to follow these steps to obtain a Health Workforce Certificate**

Only employers can submit an application form for a Health Workforce Certificate. OTDs must contact employers or recruitment agents to submit an application form.

To obtain a Health Workforce Certificate, employers will need lodge an application form with General Practice Workforce Inc. (trading as HR+ Tasmania [hrplustas.com.au](http://hrplustas.com.au)). HR+ Tasmania will work with the RWA in the relevant jurisdiction to assess the application.

1. Request an application form for a Health Workforce Certificate from [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au)
2. Fill in the form with details of the position.
3. Submit to HR+ Tasmania via [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au).
4. HR+ Tasmania will organise processing of the application.
5. Employers will be emailed with the outcome of the assessment.

If successful, employers will receive an email from HR+ Tasmania with a certification letter (Health Workforce Certificate) as a PDF attachment.

Note: HR+ Tasmania will contact employers if any further information or clarification is required. Employers can also contact HR+ on 1800 022 000.

### **Impact on Overseas-trained doctors**

The Visas for GPs initiative:

- Includes overseas doctors applying from both within and outside Australia, looking to work as skilled migrants in Australia and as holders of a temporary work or permanent residence skilled visa.
- Only impact the number of OTDs in well-serviced metropolitan locations and in capital cities.
- Limit OTDs' options for obtaining an employer-sponsored visa to positions located in rural, remote and regional areas with an expedited Health Workforce Certificate.
- Will not affect an OTD's eligibility to obtain a visa to enter Australia. The measure only reduces employers' options to recruit OTDs for filling a position in well-serviced major capital cities and metropolitan areas.
- Not impact the number of OTDs working in hospital-based positions as these positions will be automatically issued a Health Workforce Certificate.
- Not prevent currently practising doctors, including OTDs from continuing to work in their current role. OTDs will be issued an expedited Health Workforce Certificate to continue to work in their current position, in the same location and with the same employer.
- Will not prevent overseas students graduating from Australian medical schools from seeking work in Australia. They will be issued an expedited Health Workforce Certificate and will also benefit from an increased availability of specialist training places.
- Will not affect other medical occupations. For example non-GP specialists, will not require a Health Workforce Certificate.

### **Planning tool for more effective workforce distribution**

The Visas for GPs initiative will be supported by a new data planning tool developed by the Department of Health, which will support a more effective distribution of overseas trained doctors to areas where they are needed – especially regional, rural and remote areas. The planning tool will assist RWAs to determine whether the advertised position is located in an area of genuine need for primary healthcare services.

## Rural Workforce Agencies' (RWA) assessment process

RWAs will process applications for a Health Workforce Certificate according to guidelines provided by the Department of Health to ensure the assessment process is effective, transparent, and consistent with relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks.

As part of the assessment process RWAs will:

- Assess the suitability of an employer-nominated position for filling with an employer sponsored OTD.
- Assess positions and make endorsement decisions by issuing a Health Workforce Certificate according to criteria specified by the Department and local/regional knowledge.
- NOT be assessing OTDs' suitability for a visa.
- NOT issue a Health Workforce Certificate for positions in geographic locations with no identified medical skills shortage.

The assessment and endorsement process is designed to be fair and non-discriminatory.

## Options if an employer's application is declined

In cases where a certification application is declined, HR+ Tasmania will email the applicant (employer/recruitment agency). The email will provide advice on reasons for certification not being granted and what they can do to seek further advice. Where certification is not available, employers and/or OTDs are encouraged to contact HR+ Tasmania for advice on their options.

OTDs who are unable to work in a practice due to lack of certification for positions are encouraged to contact the RWA in the State/Territory in which they wish to work. The Australian Government funds RWAs to support doctors and their families to find employment and settle into their chosen community. A list of RWAs is at [doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/publishing.nsf/Content/professionalBodies](http://doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/publishing.nsf/Content/professionalBodies).

## Change in circumstances after receiving certification

If any circumstances change after the Health Workforce Certificate has been issued and prior to lodging the certificate with Home Affairs, the employer should contact the RWA for advice. If details recorded in the Health Workforce Certificate no longer match the nomination information, the application may be refused.

## Certificates issued for the nominated position and the named doctor

The doctor named on the certificate must be the doctor nominated by the employer for an employer sponsored visa. The certificate can only be used for the position nominated by the employer.

The application form will capture both the position location and the service type (e.g. Hospital; GP clinic; after-hours service etc.). The form will also require a signed undertaking that the information provided is true and correct; provision of false or misleading information would constitute fraud.

While hospital-based positions will receive automatic certification, these applications will be checked by HR+ Tasmania to ensure that the locations specified actually represent hospitals.

## Mobility conditions for employer sponsored visa holders

**TSS visa holders** must only work in a position nominated by their sponsoring employer or an associated entity of their sponsoring employer. However, certain TSS visa holders in specified occupations are exempt from this requirement and may be engaged as an independent contractor by their sponsor, and may work for multiple employers, as long as it is in the same occupation.

A new TSS nomination application would be required when:

1. A TSS visa holder wishes to change occupation; or
2. Be employed by a new sponsoring employer that has no association with the original sponsoring employer.

ENS and RSMS visa holders are permanent residents and are free to move. However, RSMS visas may be cancelled if the visa holder has not made a genuine effort to commence employment with the employer within six months of arrival or visa grant, or leaves the nominated position within two years of commencing employment.

### **Automatic issuing of Health Workforce Certificates for hospital-based positions**

Health Workforce Certificates for hospital-based positions will be issued automatically. For these positions, employers will be able to nominate multiple positions in a single form allowing an expedited application process for bulk recruitments.

State and Territory health departments and hospitals seeking to employ OTDs in primary healthcare positions will need to submit a standard form, or contact HR+ Tasmania for assistance.

### **Hospital-based positions - overview**

Hospital-based medical practitioners (or doctors) care for patients who have been referred from primary care to receive specialist secondary or tertiary care services (or more specialised services). Hospital doctors provide services to hospital in-patients, out-patients and in some specialties, to patients in the community.

Hospital doctor positions include:

- Senior doctors (Visiting Medical Officers and staff-specialists) with postgraduate specialist qualifications; and
- Junior doctors who work under their supervision (Fellows, registrars, residents, and interns). Some junior doctors may be trainees in Medical college specialist training programs.

Senior and junior doctors who work in public or private hospital emergency departments are considered hospital doctors. Private hospital-based positions are as likely to receive certification as public hospital positions.

### **Expedited issuing of a Health Workforce Certificate**

In addition to hospital-based positions, expedited endorsement will be available for:

- Positions located in rural, remote and regional areas of Australia (as defined by the Modified Monash Model eg MM categories 3-7);
- Positions for filling by Australian trained doctors who require a visa;
- Existing doctors seeking an extension of their existing working arrangements in the same position, same location with the same employer; and
- Positions nominated for filling by an OTD at an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS).

### **Processing times and guidelines for certification**

- Expedited Health Workforce Certificates will be issued within two business days.
- A standard assessment for a Health Workforce Certificate will take 5 to 10 business days. If additional information is required, or the assessment is complex, the RWA will inform the employer.
- There are no fees charged for applying and issuing of a Health Workforce Certificate.
- A doctor providing an employer's details without their consent would constitute the provision of fraudulent or misleading information.
- The information provided to a RWA in the application for certification, and in the Health Workforce Certificate (if issued), must match the information provided in the nomination form to Home Affairs.