



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Health**

**VISAS FOR GPS: TARGETING  
AREAS OF DOCTOR  
SHORTAGES  
PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

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## Introduction

The Visas for General Practitioners (GPs) Program contributes to Portfolio Strategic Priority 1 – Better Health and Ageing Outcomes and Reduced Inequality through enabling access for people in rural, remote and regional areas. The Program also contributes to Portfolio Outcome 2 – Access and Support Services through improved access to high quality, comprehensive and coordinated preventive, primary and mental health care for all Australians, with a focus on those with complex health care needs and those living in regional, rural and remote areas, including through access to a skilled health workforce.

The objective of the Visas for GPs Program is to manage the growth of Australia's medical workforce by regulating the number of overseas doctors working in the primary health care sector in major cities; and redirecting them to areas where they are most needed (i.e. regional, rural and remote areas).

As part of the Visas for GPs Program, the Visas for General Practitioners: Targeting areas of doctor shortages policy initiative was announced as a 2018-19 Budget Measure. The initiative commenced on 11 March 2019. The initiative will reduce the growth in the number of overseas doctors entering the primary health care workforce in well-served major capital cities by around 200 each year from 2018-19 to 2021-22. Building on the Visas for GPs initiative, the Better Distribution of Medical Practitioners 2019-20 Budget measure was announced in May 2019. Commencing on 1 July 2019, this measure will achieve a further reduction of 155 overseas doctors annually in well-served major capital cities from 2019-20 through to 2022-23.

## 1 Implementation

The Visas for GPs Program has been implemented through the introduction of changed processes for Employer Sponsored (ES) visas in the Skilled Migration Program. Employers seeking to engage certain medical practitioners via an ES visa, to fill a primary health care position, are required to obtain endorsement for the position from the co-ordinating Rural Workforce Agency (HR Plus Tasmania).

Since the commencement of the Visas for GPs Program, Rural Workforce Agency (RWA) endorsement has been required to fill nominated positions with an overseas doctor through ES visas in select occupations as defined by the following Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) codes:

- 253111 General Medical Practitioner
- 253112 Resident Medical Officer
- 253999 Medical Practitioner not elsewhere classified.

Employers (including hospital employers) are required to attach a Health Workforce Certificate (HWC) or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate (HWEC) to their nomination application for ES visas including:

- Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) visa
- Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) visa
- Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) visa
- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187) visa.

A visa will not be granted if an employer does not include an appropriate HWC or HWEC in the visa nomination application to the Department of Home Affairs.

Endorsement for a non-hospital based position is provided in the form of a Health Workforce Certificate – as a PDF document attached to an email – issued by HR Plus Tasmania confirming the genuine need to fill a position in any of the above three occupations at a given location in Australia by an overseas doctor.

From 16 December 2020, hospital employers are able to apply for a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate. Hospital employers need to provide a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate when nominating overseas doctors for Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) and Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) visas. Health Workforce Exemption Certificates are valid for 12 months and hospital employers are able to use the same HWEC repeatedly within the 12 month validity period to nominate overseas doctors for these temporary and provisional employer sponsored visas in the three occupations above.

Note: a separate Health Workforce Exemption Certificate is required by hospital employers to nominate overseas doctors in each of the three occupations above.

A single use Health Workforce Certificate is still required by hospital employers when nominating (up to 4) overseas doctors for the permanent Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) and Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187) visas.

The Department of Health engages RWAs to administer the Program in accordance with the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines 2017. Non-hospital based positions for overseas doctors in geographic locations where there is not an identified need for additional primary health care services will not be issued with a Health Workforce Certificate by HR Plus Tasmania. Employers who are not hospitals will not be issued a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate. Without a Health Workforce Certificate or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate for a nominated position, the nomination application cannot be approved and the related visa cannot be granted.

### **1.1 Scope**

Under the Visas for GPs Program, the Department of Home Affairs requires employers to obtain a Health Workforce Certificate or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate for all ES visa nominations in the three specified ANZSCO occupation codes. The Visas for GPs Program targets medical professionals looking to work in Australia's primary health care sector. Under this Program, employer nominated positions for filling by overseas doctors to deliver primary health care services in the three target occupations are subject to an assessment. If the position is a hospital-based position, from 16 December 2020 the hospital employer is required to provide a multiple use Health Workforce Exemption Certificate as part of the nomination application for temporary and provisional ES visas.

A single use Health Workforce Certificate is still required by hospital employers as part of the nomination application for the permanent ES visas.

The below table defines positions eligible for automatic or expedited certification under the Visas for GPs Program:

**Table 1: Eligibility for automatic or expedited certification**

Occupation Code	Service type	Practitioner	Certification
All three occupations (253111; 253112; 253999)	Hospital-based service	Permanent ES visa (subclasses 186 and 187) required for an overseas doctor	Automatic <sup>1</sup>
All three occupations (253111; 253112; 253999)	Aboriginal Medical Service	Any	Expedited <sup>2</sup>
All three occupations (253111; 253112; 253999)	Any	ES visa required for an overseas doctor's continuing employment in the same position, location and with the same employer held for the previous 12 months <sup>3</sup>	Expedited <sup>2</sup>
All three occupations (253111; 253112; 253999)	Any	ES visa required for an Australian-qualified overseas doctor	Expedited <sup>2</sup>
All three occupations (253111; 253112; 253999)	Approved Medical Deputising Service	ES visa required for an overseas doctor working in an Approved Medical Deputising Service (AMDS) as a 3GA program participant	Expedited <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fully streamlined certification. RWA position assessment is not required.

<sup>2</sup> Several administrative steps will be required. RWA position assessment may not be a required step for these positions.

<sup>3</sup> The employer must be able to demonstrate that the doctor who is in a position of continuing employment has been practicing at the nominated location for at least 12 months (for example, evidence of 12 months of MBS billing) and has an unrestricted Medicare Provider Number to work in that position.

The positions in Table 1 are issued with a Health Workforce Certificate by HR Plus Tasmania automatically or in an expedited manner. All other non-hospital based positions require a RWA assessment to determine whether the position is located in an area in need of additional primary health care services in line with the processes at 1.3.1 RWA position assessments.

If the RWA's assessment determines that the position is located in an area in need of additional primary health care services, the assessing RWA recommends to HR Plus Tasmania that a Health Workforce Certificate be issued for the nominated position. HR Plus Tasmania then issues the Health Workforce Certificate to the employer.

If the assessing RWA determines that the position is not located in an area in need of additional primary health care services, the RWA recommends to HR Plus Tasmania that a Health Workforce Certificate be declined. HR Plus Tasmania acts on the assessing RWA's recommendation, and will advise the employer that their application for a Health Workforce Certificate has been declined for the nominated position.

In some circumstances, HR Plus Tasmania may issue a Health Workforce Certificate to an applicant without the assessing RWA's endorsement of the position. These circumstances may include acting on recommendations of the Visas for GPs Review Committee (see [1.3.3 – Review of decisions](#)) or where the Department of Health advises that circumstances have changed since the last update to the Department of Health's Assessment Tool data (see [1.2 - How will it work in practice?](#)).

Being eligible for a Health Workforce Certificate does not automatically equate to eligibility for a Medicare Provider Number, including section 19AB exemptions under the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, or other requirements such as Ahpra registration, as these are independent of the Health Workforce Certificate assessment process and of the Visas for GPs Program. Equally, being eligible for a Medicare Provider Number, including a section 19AB exemption, or other requirements such as Ahpra registration does not automatically equate to eligibility for a Health Workforce Certificate.

## **1.2 How will it work in practice?**

The objective of the Visas for GPs Program is to reduce the number of overseas doctors entering the primary health care system in well-serviced major capital cities and metropolitan areas, by around 200 in 2018-19 and then by a further 155 annually from 2019-20 through to 2022-23, and to direct the flow of overseas doctors to areas most in need of primary health care services. This does not entirely prevent the issuing of any ES visas for overseas doctors in major metropolitan centres as position assessments would also be informed by considerations such as the Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification of the location.

The Department of Health and the Department of Home Affairs will monitor the volume of ES visa applications lodged and visas granted over the life of the Program to monitor trends and the impact of the Program.

The Department of Health will provide ongoing guidance to HR Plus Tasmania on position certification decision-making criteria, to ensure the objectives of the Program are met.

## **1.3 Process for certification**

The Department of Health's Visas for GPs Program communication strategy directs prospective employers, recruitment agents and other stakeholders to the DoctorConnect webpage. The Department of Home Affairs website also directs prospective employers and recruitment agents to the [DoctorConnect](#) webpage on the Department of Health's website.

The DoctorConnect webpage provides prospective employers and recruitment agents with information about the Visas for GPs Program, links to the [Visas for GPs website](#) ([www.visasforgps.com.au](http://www.visasforgps.com.au)) for online application forms, the Visas for GPs advice line and contact details for further advice.

The Visas for GPs website, advice line and mailbox is hosted by HR Plus Tasmania.

HR Plus Tasmania, as the co-ordinating RWA, performs the public-facing customer service functions for the Program, and co-ordinates the activities of the assessing RWAs. HR Plus Tasmania reviews applications to determine whether the position specified in the applications are subject to an assessment by a RWA under the Visas for GPs Program. For positions that are not, or may not be, subject to a RWA assessment and are eligible for automatic or expedited certification (Table 1)<sup>1</sup>, HR Plus Tasmania issues Health Workforce Certificates in an expedited manner.

Hospital employers seeking to nominate an overseas doctor for a hospital based position on a Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) visa or a Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) visa, need to apply for a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate (HWEC). The HWEC is valid for 12 months and is issued automatically by HR Plus Tasmania to hospital employers. Once issued, the same HWEC can be used repeatedly within the 12 month validity period to nominate overseas doctors for these temporary and provisional employer sponsored visas in the three occupations above.

A separate multiple use Health Workforce Exemption Certificate is required by hospital employers to nominate overseas doctors for each of the above three occupations.

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<sup>1</sup> As the majority of these applications are submitted by state and territory government employers, streamlined processing will apply to ensure automatic certification is provided for nominated positions.

A single use Health Workforce Certificate is still required by hospital employers when nominating (up to 4) overseas doctors for the permanent Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) and Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187) visas.

Employers and recruitment agents (applicants) must complete an online form available from the [Visas for GPs website](http://www.visasforgps.com.au) (www.visasforgps.com.au) to obtain certification of a nominated position. Alternatively, applicants can request an electronically fillable application form to complete and submit to [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au). Applicants can contact HR Plus on 1800 022 000 or via email at [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au) for further information, to seek clarification on the Visas for GPs Program or to request an Application Form via email.

HR Plus Tasmania refers relevant applications to assessing RWAs for assessment. Assessing RWAs conduct position assessments and provide recommendations on certification eligibility to HR Plus Tasmania who then issues a Health Workforce Certificate for eligible positions based on the assessing RWAs' recommendations.

In some cases, employers may seek certification for a position in which a medical practitioner has not yet been identified. In these cases, HR Plus Tasmania refers the application to the relevant RWA for assessment as the assessing RWA does not require practitioner details in order to perform an assessment and produce a recommendation. Should the assessing RWA recommend certification for the position, HR Plus Tasmania advises the applicant of the position's eligibility as 'endorsed pending practitioner details'. However, a Health Workforce Certificate will not be issued until a practitioner has been identified for the position and their details provided to HR Plus Tasmania<sup>2</sup>. The interim endorsement will expire six months after the notification date.

HR Plus Tasmania issues Health Workforce Certificates for all eligible positions and advises Health Workforce Certificate applicants via email and provides the Health Workforce Certificate as a PDF attachment.

HR Plus Tasmania also advises Health Workforce Certificate applicants of the outcome of unsuccessful applications via email. This email may offer applicants, and/or the overseas doctors they want to recruit, options to access further advice and support from RWAs. Advice from HR Plus Tasmania on options for further advice and assistance is a separate service to the Visas for GPs Program.

HR Plus Tasmania also refers requests for a review of the position assessment decision to the Department of Health.

### **1.3.1 RWA assessments of non-hospital based positions**

In the interests of fairness and transparency, a standard approach to RWA position assessments is applied consistently across all jurisdictions.

Assessing RWAs are provided with training and guidelines for using the Department of Health's Assessment Tool to identify the characteristics of the GP catchment in which the position is located.

The Department of Health also provides position assessment guidelines setting out parameters and thresholds for determining a position's eligibility for certification according to a GP catchment's characteristics.

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<sup>2</sup> Practitioner details such as name, date of birth, qualifications (ie. whether Australian or overseas trained) and employment status (ie. whether currently employed in the position) are required for two purposes: to determine whether the application is subject to a RWA assessment under the Visas for GPs Program, and to ensure that details in the Health Workforce Certificate match those in the employer sponsored visa nomination provided to the Department of Home Affairs.

Assessing RWAs are required to consistently follow the guidelines when performing the Assessment Tool informed position assessments. Assessing RWAs are required to use the Assessment Tool for an evidence-based approach to identify genuine need for additional primary health care services in a GP catchment where patients are accessing general practice services (see the Assessment Tool Fact Sheet at Appendix 1 for more information).

An assessment of a position in a given location using the Assessment Tool will be based on the characteristics of a GP catchment. GP catchment characteristics such as the catchment size; the number of dedicated GPs and number of GP practices in the catchment; GP to population ratio; GP over-capacity; service complexity; the level of socio-economic disadvantage, the types of services available; Modified Monash (MM) Model classification of the actual position location; the demographics of patients and providers; and whether there is a public emergency department are important considerations that assessing RWAs are required to consider when performing an assessment. The Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification of the actual location of the nominated position is also an important consideration.

For assessments of positions in MM 1 areas, assessing RWAs rely on the Assessment Tool to assess a nominated position by evaluating criteria specified in the Assessment Tool. Final outcome for MM 1 GP catchments will be informed by consideration of GP catchment characteristics in the Assessment Tool including the DPA considerations. The assessing RWA will not apply any further criteria in providing their recommendation to HR Plus Tasmania. HR Plus Tasmania makes the final decision in accordance with the guidelines and, where provided, advice from the Department of Health.

For assessments of positions in MM 2-7 areas, assessing RWAs are able to also apply their local knowledge and workforce planning expertise where relevant, in addition to using the Assessment Tool.

A provision was previously put in place for employers and practices who had made arrangements to contract an overseas doctor prior to the commencement of the Program on 11 March 2019. This enabled employers and practices to receive a Health Workforce Certificate on production of a signed contract or letter of offer showing agreement from both parties prior to the Program commencement date. This provision ended on 30 June 2019.

### **Sample RWA assessment task**

Table 2 presents an example of a position assessment referred to an assessing RWA by HR Plus Tasmania.

The upper section (in grey) contains the information the assessing RWAs require to perform the assessment (Note: assessing RWAs do not require employer or practitioner details in order to assess positions). The lower section (in blue) sets out the information the assessing RWA is required to return to HR Plus Tasmania. Note that 'Assessment Tool outcome' and 'Recommendation' are separate fields, allowing assessing RWAs to depart from the Assessment Tool outcome where needed. Assessing RWAs are required to provide a brief rationale for the recommendation.

**Table 2: Position assessment**

Case ID	
Occupation Code	253111 - General Medical Practitioner
Main Job Location	5 King St Bourke NSW 2840
Main Service	1. Primary Health / GP Clinic
Secondary Job Location	N/a
Secondary Service	N/a
Case ID	
Main Job Location MMM	
Main Job Location GP Catchment ID	
Secondary Job Location MMM	N/a
Secondary Job Location GP Catchment ID	N/a
Assessment Tool Outcome	Eligible
Recommendation	Certificate to be issued.
Response Date	

### 1.3.2 Communication and documentation

Visas for GPs communication materials are provided by the Department of Health to RWAs. RWAs will also be provided with relevant media updates, progress reports, ad-hoc advice and revised communication materials by the Department of Health over the life of the Visas for GPs Program. These materials, including any approved corporate branding for the Program, may be used on RWAs' websites and in their correspondence, to communicate with stakeholders about the Program.

#### Standard Application Form

HR Plus Tasmania provides an online form for Health Workforce Certificate applicants to complete and submit. An electronically fillable Standard Application Form for Health Workforce Certificate applicants is available on request. A link to the online form is available from the [Visas for GPs website](#).

The Standard Application Form includes advice to applicants regarding the privacy and security of information, and advice regarding the provision of false or misleading information.

**Note:** A Standard Application Form allows nomination of only one position for certification.

#### Hospital Based Positions Application Forms

HR Plus Tasmania provides online forms for easy completion and submission. Electronically fillable Hospital Based Position Application Forms - Health Workforce Exemption Certificate for temporary and provisional ES visas and Health Workforce Certificate for permanent ES visas - is available on request. A link to the online forms is available from the [Visas for GPs website](#).

The Hospital Based Position – Health Workforce Exemption Certificate Application Form allows state and territory health departments and private hospital administrators – or recruitment agencies representing them – to apply for an exemption from having to apply for a Health Workforce Certificate when nominating overseas doctors for temporary and provisional ES visas. The Health Workforce Exemption Certificate is valid for 12 months and can be used repeatedly during the validity period of the certificate.

The Hospital Based Position – Health Workforce Certificate Application Form allows state and territory health departments and private hospital administrators to nominate up to four positions using one application form when nominating overseas doctors for permanent ES visas.

### **Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates**

HR Plus Tasmania issues Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates to applicants via email, in the form of a PDF attachment. Employers are required to include the certificate (the PDF document) when submitting their employer sponsored visa nomination application to the Department of Home Affairs. Health Workforce Certificate and Health Workforce Exemption Certificate PDF documents are issued in a standard format according to the Department of Home Affairs' specifications.

A Health Workforce Certificate needs to be lodged with the Department of Home Affairs within six months of its issue date. The Health Workforce Certificate specifies the date it needs to be lodged by with the Department of Home Affairs.

A Health Workforce Exemption Certificate is valid for 12 months. The Health Workforce Exemption Certificate specifies the date it can be repeatedly lodged by with the Department of Home Affairs.

Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates cannot be changed except for administrative errors. All requests for amendments must be lodged with HR Plus Tasmania in writing. If an incorrect occupation code has been nominated in the application, a new application will need to be lodged with the correct occupation code.

Issued Health Workforce Certificates can only be renewed once (for a further 6 month period) in the event of expiry prior to lodging an ES visa nomination application with the Department of Home Affairs. Applications for the renewal of a Health Workforce Certificate must be submitted to HR Plus Tasmania within thirty (30) calendar days of the expiry date printed on the front of the Health Workforce Certificate. Applications for renewal are made using the Standard Application Form, available on the [Visas for GPs website](#).

### **Declined applications**

For declined Health Workforce Certificate applications, HR Plus Tasmania advises Health Workforce Certificate and Health Workforce Exemption Certificate applicants via email. This advice will include reasons for the decision and options available to applicants.

### **Data items**

HR Plus Tasmania is required to document and maintain the administrative dataset generated by Visas for GPs Program activities, including the applicant/employer, position and practitioner information from application forms, and other information including details of application outcomes and reasons for the decisions to (or not to) issue a Health Workforce Certificate or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate.

### 1.3.3 Review of decisions

Applicants may request a review of a decision by the Department of Health's Health Workforce Certificate Review Committee (the Review Committee). The Review Committee reviews original decisions and can confirm decisions or substitute those with new decisions. In cases where an applicant seeks review of a RWA decision to not issue a Health Workforce Certificate or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate, HR Plus Tasmania is required to maintain a record of all correspondence with the applicant and provide this, and other documents related to the original assessment, to the Department of Health.

If an applicant wishes to have a decision reviewed, they must notify HR Plus Tasmania in writing within thirty (30) business days of the date HR Plus Tasmania notified the applicant of the original decision. HR Plus Tasmania will then refer the request to the Review Committee. The Department of Health will only receive requests for review from HR Plus Tasmania. Any direct requests from applicants to the Department of Health will not be accepted and will be referred back to HR Plus Tasmania. The Department of Health will email the review applicant to acknowledge the receipt of the review applications referred to them. Review applicants are able to make subsequent contacts directly with the Department of Health through a specified email address provided to them.

The Review Committee will consider whether the assessment process was undertaken by the RWA according to the published Program Guidelines and Program procedures. The Review Committee may consider:

- the RWA's original decision;
- whether the assessment was conducted according to the Program Guidelines;
- information provided to the RWAs as part of the Health Workforce Certificate application;
- additional information provided by the applicant in the review request;
- the results of the Review Committee's own data analysis, if any; and
- any other matter the Review Committee considers relevant.

The Review Committee may request additional information from the RWA regarding the location of the practice, this includes for MM 1 areas.

The Department of Health works towards providing a response to review applicants within thirty (30) business days of the date the review request is referred to the Department by HR Plus Tasmania. The Review Committee notifies applicants and HR Plus Tasmania of its final decision. HR Plus Tasmania will note the outcome of reviews on its administrative dataset, and issue a Health Workforce Certificate if directed to by the Department of Health. (See: [Health Workforce Certificate Review Process](#))

### 1.3.4 Service standards

- No fees are charged to applicants by the RWAs for any service relating to the Visas for GPs Program.
- A majority of applications to receive a response (whether declined, certified, or certified pending provision of practitioner details) within five to ten (5-10) business days from the date of application.
- The following processing time service standards apply:
  - Positions eligible for Automatic Certification and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates – Majority of applications to be processed within two (2) business days.
  - Positions eligible for Expedited Certification – Majority of applications to be processed within two to four (2-4) business days.

- Positions requiring RWA assessment for certification – Majority of applications to be processed within five to ten (5-10) business days.
- Positions ‘endorsed pending practitioner details’ – Majority of applications to receive a Health Workforce Certificate within two (2) business days of providing the practitioner’s details to HR Plus Tasmania.
- Applicants referred to the Review Committee will generally receive a response within thirty (30) business days from the date of referral to the Department of Health.

## **2 Agency responsibilities**

### **2.1 Department of Health**

Key responsibilities include:

- Produce communication materials for key stakeholders relating to the Visas for GPs Program.
- Provide tools (e.g. Assessment Tool), templates, guidelines and other supporting material for RWA administration and assessment activities.
- Receive and respond to referrals from HR Plus Tasmania to the Review Committee.
- Provide funding for all HR Plus Tasmania and assessing RWA activities for the Visas for GPs Program, in accordance with established funding agreements.
- Provide periodic data and ad-hoc reports to the Department of Home Affairs, for validation, progress monitoring and issues management purposes.
- Receive periodic data and ad-hoc reports from the Department of Home Affairs, for progress monitoring and issues management purposes.
- Provide progress updates, communiques and ad-hoc advice to RWAs and other key stakeholders, including responses to media enquiries relating to the Visas for GPs Program.
- Receive periodic and ad-hoc data reports on Visas for GPs Program activity from RWAs.

### **2.2 Department of Home Affairs**

Key responsibilities include:

- Ensure that relevant online, print and other information sources direct prospective employer sponsors of visas for overseas doctors to *DoctorConnect*.
- Receive and process Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates in accordance with Visas for GPs Program specifications.
- Provide periodic and ad-hoc data to the Department of Health for progress monitoring and issue management purposes.

### **2.3 Applicants (Employers and recruitment agents)**

Key responsibilities include:

- Complete and submit application forms with correct information, including practitioner details when available.
- Provide an appropriate Health Workforce Certificate or Health Workforce Exemption Certificate to the Department of Home Affairs with an ES visa nomination application within the time period advised on the Certificate, ensuring all details provided in the nomination application (e.g. employer name, position location etc.) are consistent with those in the Health Workforce Certificate or Health Workforce Exemption Certificate.

- Seek advice from HR Plus Tasmania if any details relating to the nominated position change prior to submitting the nomination application for an ES visa, and submit a new Health Workforce Certificate or Health Workforce Exemption Certificate application if required.

## **2.4 HR Plus Tasmania.**

Key responsibilities include:

- Contribute to the development of Visas for GPs Program information resources, templates, guidelines and other supporting material in collaboration with the Department of Health.
- Maintain hosting of online application forms for Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates.
- Establish and manage a mailbox and a 1800 contact number, for receiving and responding to information requests and enquiries.
- Receive, document and process applications in a timely manner, according to the Service Standards listed at 1.3.4 above.
- Issue Health Workforce Certificates for eligible nominated positions and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates to eligible hospital employers.
- Refer, co-ordinate and support the assessing RWA's assessment activities.
- Produce and maintain administrative data according to the Department of Health's specifications.
- Provide periodic and ad-hoc data reports to the Department of Health.
- Provide advice and assistance related to the Visas for GPs Program to 'declined' applicants as required.
- Refer Health Workforce Certificate applicants requesting a review of a decision to the Department of Health, along with documentation including the original application form; correspondence; supporting evidence; and any related information, required, or requested, by the Review Committee.

## **2.5 Assessing RWAs**

Key responsibilities include:

- Receive position assessment tasks from HR Plus Tasmania.
- Conduct position assessments using the Assessment Tool and guidelines provided by the Department of Health.
- Document assessment outcomes and recommendations according to the Program Guidelines.
- Provide recommendations and advice to HR Plus Tasmania in the specified format and in a timely manner.
- Respond to stakeholder enquiries using Visas for GPs communication materials, or refer enquiries to HR Plus Tasmania.
- Contribute to RWA workshops, forums and/or consultations conducted by the Department of Health in relation to the Visas for GPs Program.

### **3 Evaluation**

Quarterly Reports will be provided to the Department of Health by HR Plus Tasmania at the end of each quarter in the period covered by the grant activity for the Visas for GPs Program.

Additionally, regular and ongoing monitoring of visa applications and grants data will be undertaken by the Department of Home Affairs and relevant data provided to the Department of Health to inform the evaluation of the Visas for GPs Program. An internal evaluation of the implementation of the Visas for GPs Program was conducted in 2019. An external evaluation will be conducted in mid to late 2020, approximately one year after the implementation of the Program.

A final report from HR Plus Tasmania on operations of the grant activity will be provided to the Department of Health at the end of the grant activity.

### **4 Privacy**

Employer and practitioner information is to be collected by HR Plus Tasmania for the purpose of determining eligibility for Health Workforce Certificates and Health Workforce Exemption Certificates, and for administration of the Visas for GPs Program only. Personal information may be shared with other bodies responsible for the Visas for GPs Program including the Department of Health, the Department of Home Affairs and the network of RWAs. This information may also be used for monitoring and the evaluation of the Visas for GPs Program. All collected personal information is protected by law under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

## **5 Appendices**

### **5.1 Appendix 1 – Assessment Tool Fact Sheet**

The Visas for GPs Program is supported by the Department of Health's Assessment Tool. Under the Visas for GPs Program, Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs) are required to use the Assessment Tool to evaluate a location based on the characteristics of a GP catchment where patients are accessing general practice services.

#### **5.1.1 What is the Assessment Tool?**

The Assessment Tool enables RWAs to identify the need for additional primary care in a given GP catchment.

The Assessment Tool uses an evidence-based approach to identify genuine need for additional primary health care services in a GP catchment. This is based on characteristics of the GP catchment including: the number of dedicated GPs in the catchment; GP over-capacity; service complexity; the level of socio-economic disadvantage; the types of services available; and the demographics of patients and providers. The Assessment Tool assists in identifying areas of greatest need by comparing primary health care services delivered in areas of similar populations.

The Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification of the location of the nominated position is also a consideration in the Assessment Tool.

#### **5.1.2 What is a GP catchment?**

The GP catchments were constructed using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Australian Statistical Geographical Standard (ASGS) 2016, along with five years' worth of Medicare data, and demographic data such as the ABS Australian Population Grid and Residential Mesh Blocks 2016.

A total of 829 non-overlapping GP catchments were formed by aggregating sub-catchments, taking into account a number of factors including:

- patient flows using MBS patient and provider data over a five year period
- population demographics, e.g. population size and distribution
- GP workforce, e.g. location and number of GPs
- GP infrastructure, e.g. location and number of practices
- accessibility, e.g. catchment size, travel distance and road networks
- topography, e.g. mountain ranges, national parks, water bodies, islands
- recognition of other boundaries, e.g. state and territory borders, local government areas.

GP catchments complement existing geographies in operation across the Department. This provides the basis to conduct supply and demand modelling, visualisation and scenario planning for workforce planning.

#### **5.1.3 What factors does the Assessment Tool consider?**

The Assessment Tool considers the following indicators of primary care to inform the Health Workforce Certificate outcome for a nominated position:

- Dedicated GPs in the catchment

A dedicated GP is defined as a GP who provides the majority or all of their services within the catchment.

- Catchment reliance on one (or a few) GPs

A catchment is classified as being at risk of relying on one (or a few) GPs if there are one or a few dedicated GPs who provides the majority of the catchments services.

- Catchment reliance on Locums/FIFO/DIDO

A catchment is at risk of relying on servicing by locums/Fly-In-Fly-Out/Drive-In-Drive-Out doctors if most doctors spend little time in the catchment and provide very little of the catchment's services.

- Catchment MM classification

GP catchments have been assigned a Modified Monash (MM) Model grouping based on the MM classifications of the SA1s in the catchment where the majority of population live (2017 ERP).

- GP full time equivalent (GP FTE)

GP FTE is calculated based on billable time, non-billable time, and non-clinical time combined to produce the final GP FTE figure. Each Medicare Benefits Schedule item is assigned a measure of GP effort, which is aggregated to measure the total impact of a GP's Medicare services provided in terms of the time spent on Medicare billings.

- GPs over-capacity (overworked) in the catchment

A catchment is classified as being at risk of having GPs who are overcapacity if a substantial proportion of GPs are working significantly more than fulltime hours (40 hours per week).

- Potential local unmet need

A catchment is classified as possibly having unmet local need when the local GP access combined with the pattern of the residents services indicate the possibility that local need is not being met locally. Where GPs are mostly servicing locals they may not have the capacity to fulfil all of the local servicing requirements, therefore residents are obtaining their services outside of the catchment.

- Local access to GPs

Catchment access to GPs is classified based on the GP FTE per 1000 catchment residents:

- GPFTE per 1000 residents below the 35th percentile<sup>3</sup> is below standard
- GPFTE per 1000 residents between the 35th and 65th percentile is standard
- GPFTE per 1000 residents between the 65th and 90th percentile is above standard
- GPFTE per 1000 residents above the 90th percentile is well above standard.

- Socio-economic disadvantage level

The socio-economic disadvantage level is based on the Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) – a product developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. These indexes are based on the latest five-yearly Census data. Catchments are classified as low, moderate, or high disadvantaged based on the proportion of the population living in first quintile SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) – Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1).

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<sup>3</sup> Percentile is calculated based on the distribution of the values of a particular variable. In this case it is the distribution of GPFTE per 1,000 residents in the 829 catchments.

- The local GP access combined with the socio-economic disadvantage level

GP access may not be adequate when considering the level of socio-economic disadvantage in the catchment. For example, a 'standard' GP access may be sufficient for a low disadvantage catchment while it may not be adequate if a catchment has a moderate to high level of disadvantage.

- Inflated GP access

A high number of GPs working extended hours may result in the GP access falsely appearing to be adequate according to the level of socio-economic disadvantage of the catchment.

- Distribution Priority Areas (DPA)

The Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification identifies locations in Australia with a shortage of medical practitioners. Further information on DPA classifications is available on DoctorConnect<<https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/doctorconnect>>.

#### **5.1.4 What is the source of the data used in the Assessment Tool?**

The data is sourced from:

- Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS claims) data,
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, and
- National Health Services Directory.

#### **5.1.5 Glossary of Terms**

FIFO: Fly-in-fly-out

DIDO: Drive-in-drive-out

GP FTE: General Practitioner Full Time Equivalent is a new method to count the total effort spent by GPs. The method calculates a GP's workload based on MBS services claimed, with one GPFTE representing a 40 hour week over 46 weeks of the year. For each Medicare provider, the new measure attributes an estimate of the amount of time they have spent on their claims in relation to what would be worked by a fulltime GP, including billable time, non-billable time, and non-clinical time.

MM: Modified Monash Model

DPA: Distribution Priority Area

MBS: Medical Benefits Scheme

ERP: Estimated Resident Population

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0>

SEIFA: Socio Economic Index for Areas

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2033.0.55.001>

IRSAD: Index of Relative Socioeconomic Advantage and Disadvantage

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2033.0.55.001main+features100042011>