



# Frequently Asked Questions for participants – Reforms to the Rural Procedural Grants Program

## Program reforms

### What is changing under the Rural Procedural Grants Program (RPGP)? And why?

A number of reforms to the RPGP are being undertaken to better target the program and to respond to emerging priorities. The reforms are necessary to ensure the program is appropriately targeted to communities with the greatest need, and remains financially sustainable into the future.

The reforms follow an Independent Review that was undertaken by the Nous Group during 2017. The review utilised a range of information including program and Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) data, extensive stakeholder consultations and a review of relevant national and international literature.

The main changes are:

- Introducing support for emergency mental health training (implemented from 1 July 2020).
- Moving the geographical classification system underpinning eligibility for the RPGP from ASGC-RA 2-5 to Modified Monash (MM) 3 -7.
- Restricting eligibility to GPs holding vocational recognition as a general practitioner (VR GP) or enrolled in a Fellowship pathway with either ACRRM or RACGP.
- Transferring the responsibility for administering RPGP grant payments to the two GP Colleges, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). This function was previously undertaken by Services Australia (implemented from 1 July 2020).

The implementation of some of these reforms has been delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 1 January 2021, the remaining changes will be brought into effect.

### What evidence was used to develop these reforms?

The reforms were based on a range of evidence, including the Nous review, recommendations from the Independent Expert Panel (IEP review) of the distribution working group, and input from the profession. The proposed reforms were also discussed with key rural stakeholders and the jurisdictions before being finalised and provided to the Minister for consideration.

### When will the reforms be implemented?

Some reforms were implemented on 1 July 2020, with the remaining reforms to be implemented from 1 January 2021. This staggered approach has given the GP Colleges time to implement their payment systems, and impacted GPs an opportunity to complete any planned Continued Professional Development.

## Why has the program eligibility changed to MM 3-7?

This was a recommendation of the Nous Review, which found that use of the Modified Monash Model classification system provides a more granular view of rural and remote locations. Restricting the RPGP to MM 3-7 targets support towards procedural GPs in smaller and more remote communities, to recognise their services and assist them to maintain their skills. From January 2020 all Department programs are transitioning to the MMM classification.

## Why have you introduced additional payments for CPD in emergency mental health?

Consultations undertaken in the course of the Nous Review identified mental health as a key health need among rural communities, with GPs working in emergency medicine often the front line for dealing with rural patients suffering from mental health problems and substance abuse. The reforms to the RPGP provide capacity for GPs working in emergency medicine to access additional grant payments for building and maintaining their skills in mental health. This is a clear priority for the Australian Government.

This reform means GP practising emergency medicine have access to grant payments of \$2000 per day for up to three days of CPD activities in mental health, on top of their existing entitlement under the RPGP.

## Who is eligible for the new emergency mental health training offered under the RPGP?

GPs practising emergency medicine, and who are responsible for providing emergency mental health services or crisis intervention, will be eligible to claim a grant of \$2,000 per day for 3 days of CPD in mental health, which is in addition to the 3 days of emergency medicine CPD already available under the RPGP.

## Is this a cost savings measure/reform?

No, this is not a cost savings measure. The quantum of grant funds available to GPs remains the same. The funds saved from moving to the MM 3-7 classification range and restricting the eligibility to VR GPs and those enrolled in a Fellowship pathway with a GP College will be reinvested into support for rural GPs with the introduction of grants to support emergency mental health skills enhancement.

This was identified by both rural GPs and rural health stakeholder groups as a significant area of community need.

## Who will be affected by the reforms?

A small cohort of GPs that are currently eligible for the RPGP will no longer be able to access these grants from 1 January 2021. This includes GPs living and working in MM2 areas, which are generally larger regional centres that can offer a range of specialist services that are not available in smaller towns. GPs in these locations will retain eligibility for the RPGP if they perform outreach services in MM 3-7 areas including through locum work. Locums who provide 28 days per financial year or more of locum work as a procedural GP in MM3-7 will continue to be able to access the RPGP.

GPs who do not hold vocational recognition as a general practitioner (VR GP) will no longer be eligible for the RPGP. However, GP registrars enrolled in a Fellowship pathway with either ACRRM or RACGP will continue to be able to access the program if they meet other eligibility criteria.

## How do these changes impact on the GP colleges?

From 1 July 2020 the roles of the GP Colleges were enhanced to ensure that this program is managed by the GP profession. The GP Colleges are responsible for:

- determining the eligibility of applicants and of proposed skills training to be undertaken, and
- the administration of grant payments directly to GPs.

## Changes to program administration

### Do I need to re-enrol in the program after 1 January 2021 if I am already enrolled?

No, existing participants do not need to re-enrol after the changes come into effect. The GP Colleges will advise those doctors enrolled for the RGP who are no longer eligible.

### Do I need to provide my registered College with any additional information after 1 January 2021?

If your eligibility has changed or your credentials have been updated it is important that you advise the GP College that you are registered with for the RGP so that the GP College has all of the necessary up to date information to verify your claims.

### How will the administrative changes impact individual rural procedural GPs?

There will continue to be very little impact for GPs who are still eligible for the RGP. Rural GPs will still apply to the GP College of their choice (noting GPs can only enrol/be registered with one college at a time). Once eligibility has been determined, the college will process claims and provide funds into a GP's nominated bank account.

### How will I receive the support payments?

Once the College has verified a valid claim from a registered GP, the College will make the payment into your designated account. It is important to keep your bank details updated to ensure payments are accurately processed.

### How long will it take to receive my payment?

Once you have provided all of the correct information in relation to your claim and it has been verified by the College, you should receive payment into your designated bank account within approximately 2 weeks. You should receive an email from the College advising that your claim has been processed and what date you can expect the payment.

### I won't be eligible for the RGP under the new program rules, but have CPD activities already booked. Does that mean I won't be able to claim for these?

The government recognises that GPs who are no longer eligible for the RGP may already have plans in place to undertake CPD activities in 2021. For this reason, GPs who have already booked or planned CPD activities before 1 January 2021 can still claim for activities that occur up until 30 June 2021. You will need to provide evidence that the activity was booked before 31 December 2020.

I won't be eligible for the RPGP under the new program rules, but haven't claimed for activities I undertook before 1 January 2021. Can I still claim?

Yes. If you are enrolled in the program and have attended eligible activities prior to 1 January 2021, you can still make a claim even if you are no longer eligible for the RPGP from 1 January 2021. You must be enrolled in the program before 1 January 2021 to be eligible to make a claim.

You will have until 30 June 2021 to make a claim under the previous eligibility criteria.

Can I change the College I am currently enrolled with under the RPGP?

Yes, you can change the College that you are enrolled with for the RPGP, however you will need to inform the College in writing and agree that your RPGP details, including documentation verifying your eligibility and your previous claims record, are transferred to the other College. You can only be registered with one College at a time.

I am a Locum GP, will I still be eligible for the RPGP under the new rules?

Yes, GPs performing locum work in rural areas are still eligible for the RPGP, as long as they meet the revised eligibility criteria: they must be vocationally recognised and be performing eligible locum work in MM 3-7 locations.

The existing requirement for a minimum of 28 days of rural locum work per financial year remains unchanged.

Do I need to be registered before I can claim the RPGP?

Yes. In order to claim the RPGP payment you must first register with either the RACGP or the ACRRM for the RPGP.

Will there be new program guidelines? When will they be published?

The 2011 program guidelines will be replaced by the 2021 program guidelines. These guidelines will be published by the Department, the RACGP and the ACRRM on their websites prior to the implementation of program reforms on 1 January 2021.