

PRESS RELEASE

Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC)

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CPMC Warns AHPRA's Plan Won't Fix Doctor Shortages in Regional Areas and Key Specialties

Following the release of the Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce Report, the Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) has again warned that fast-tracking International Medical Graduate registration alone will not solve Australia's rural healthcare challenges. Without proper planning, new specialists may concentrate in urban areas while regional communities continue to face specialist shortages.

"While we welcome the broader health workforce reform agenda outlined in the Scope of Practice Review, we cannot accept an implementation approach for international medical registration that fails to address the fundamental challenge of ensuring all Australians have access to appropriate specialist care," said A/Prof Sanjay Jeganathan, Chair of CPMC. "Regional Australians deserve the same quality healthcare as city residents, yet the current approach risks widening rather than closing these geographical healthcare gaps."

CPMC acknowledges AHPRA's invitation for ongoing collaboration and reaffirms its commitment to working constructively with AHPRA, the Medical Board of Australia, and Minister Butler on international medical registration and broader workforce reforms. We emphasise that any changes to registration pathways must be part of a comprehensive strategy that genuinely addresses workforce maldistribution and maintains Australia's high standards of specialist care. Practising medical specialists and GPs through the colleges need to be part of the process.

Evidence shows that while SIMG registrations have increased by 27% under current pathways, these specialists need to flow to regional areas where they are most needed. "While CPMC supports appropriately qualified specialists helping to address workforce challenges, success depends on implementing proper systems to ensure they are directed to communities with the greatest needs, supported by robust quality assurance processes," said A/Prof Jeganathan.

CPMC's concerns about the expedited pathway implementation include:

1. No clear mechanisms to direct specialists to areas of genuine workforce shortage

2. Lack of detail about maintaining standards through the qualification equivalency process
3. Absence of strategies to ensure long-term retention in rural and regional areas
4. Limited integration with existing specialist training pathways
5. Insufficient consideration of specialty-specific challenges
6. Inadequate detail about supervision and quality assurance processes

"Fast-tracking overseas specialists without addressing underlying distribution issues won't solve our core challenges," explained A/Prof Jeganathan. "Rural Australians will still face the same barriers to accessing specialist care, and understaffed specialities may remain under-resourced."

While AHPRA has indicated that the Australian Medical Council will assess qualification equivalency, CPMC maintains that successful implementation requires:

- Transparent criteria for assessing international qualifications
- Clear supervision and monitoring frameworks
- Integration with existing workforce distribution initiatives
- Specialty-specific approaches that recognise different practice requirements
- Robust evaluation mechanisms to ensure safety and effectiveness

"The specialist medical colleges have extensive experience in assessing international medical graduates and understanding the unique requirements of specialist practice in Australia, particularly in rural and remote settings," said A/Prof Jeganathan. "This expertise must be properly utilised to ensure these reforms achieve their intended outcomes."

"We remain committed to supporting initiatives that will genuinely improve access to specialist care for all Australians," concluded A/Prof Jeganathan. "However, these initiatives must be properly planned, adequately detailed, and effectively targeted to address real workforce needs."

Media Contact:

CEO, CPMC

Phone: +61 413 802 600 or 1300 603 157

Email: ceo@cpmc.edu.au

The Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) is Australia's peak body representing specialist medical colleges. Find us at: www.cpmc.edu.au or Twitter: @CPMC_Aust