



**Australian Government**  

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**Department of Health and Ageing**

# **Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce program**

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

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# CONTENTS

<b>1. GENERAL</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 What is the Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce (BNBW) program?	4
1.2 What does the BNBW program aim to achieve?	4
1.3 When does the program start?	4
1.4 How can I find out more about the program?	5
<b>2. NURSES</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Which nurses/midwives are eligible for the program?	5
2.2 What happens if I return to nursing/midwifery work part-time or on a casual basis under the program?	5
2.3 Am I eligible for the program if I have worked as a nurse/midwife periodically over the past 12 months?	5
2.4 Do I have to be currently registered or enrolled in my State/Territory to be eligible for the program?	6
2.5 Do I have to stay within the same employment sector (i.e. public hospital, private hospital, community health setting residential aged care sector or community package aged care service) for the full 18 months to receive both bonus payments?	6
2.6 What happens if I move between employers in the same sector within the 6 month or 18 month period?	6
2.7 Am I able to take leave from my employer whilst I am on the program?	6
2.8 I have returned to work as a nurse/midwife full-time but in two separate locations. Am I eligible to receive the full-time bonus payments?	7
2.9 I have nursing qualifications but have never been registered or worked as a nurse in Australia. Am I eligible for the program?	7
2.10 I have returned to work in an eligible facility but have not been offered the bonus. Am I eligible?	7
2.11 Am I eligible if I am under investigation by the State or Territory regulatory body?	7
2.12 Are the bonus payments taxable?	8
2.13 When will the bonus payments be made to each eligible nurse/midwife?	8
2.14 What is the maximum time that nurses/midwives can be out of the workforce to qualify for the program?	8
2.15 How can I apply for the bonus payments?	8
<b>3. ORGANISATIONS - GENERAL</b>	<b>8</b>

3.1	<i>Which organisations are eligible to participate in the BNBW program?</i>	8
3.2	<i>Will the employer be required to report information under this program?</i>	9
3.3	<i>If a nurse changes employer part way through the 18 months period, does the initial employer lose their bonus?</i>	9
3.4	<i>At what point will the employer receive the \$1,000 bonus?</i>	9
3.5	<i>Will organisations have to pay the returning nurses their two bonus payments?</i>	9
3.6	<i>The program covers hospitals and residential aged care homes. Does the program cover other kinds of health services, such as community health services?</i>	10
4.	<b>PUBLIC HOSPITALS</b>	10
4.1	<i>How many nursing places will be allocated to each public hospital?</i>	10
5.	<b>COMMUNITY SETTINGS</b>	10
5.1	<i>How will the public community setting places be allocated?</i>	10
6.	<b>PRIVATE HOSPITALS</b>	10
6.1	<i>How will the private hospital places be allocated?</i>	10
7.	<b>RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE HOMES AND COMMUNITY PACKAGE AGED CARE SERVICES</b>	11
7.1	<i>Which residential aged care homes and community package aged care services are eligible employers under this program?</i>	11
7.2	<i>How many nurses may I employ and receive payments for under this program?</i>	11
7.3	<i>Who is responsible for determining the eligibility of a nurse under this program?</i>	11
7.4	<i>Can employers choose to apply additional criteria/priorities to eligibility and selection?</i>	11
7.5	<i>Can nurses be employed on a part time basis under this program?</i>	11
7.6	<i>Can nurses be employed with multiple eligible employers?</i>	12
7.7	<i>When is the \$1,000 employer bonus paid?</i>	12
7.8	<i>What is required from the employer in relation to the \$1,000 employer bonus?</i>	12
7.9	<i>Is the \$1,000 employer bonus regarded as taxable income?</i>	12
7.10	<i>What happens if the nurse changes employers?</i>	13
7.11	<i>Where can I go for further information?</i>	13
7.12	<i>Where does the employer/employee go for assistance if there is a disagreement between the two parties in relation to this program?</i>	13
7.13	<i>Is the employer required to report information under this program?</i>	13
7.14	<i>What support will the Australian Government provide for the implementation and administration of the program?</i>	13
	<b>Glossary</b>	14

# 1. GENERAL

## 1.1 What is the Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce (BNBW) program?

This program was announced on 15 January 2008 by the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP and the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon MP. The program commits \$39.4 million over five years to provide places for 7,750 extra nurses and midwives in public and private hospitals and 1,000 nurses in residential aged care homes. This program is part of a larger measure through which the Government will provide \$138.9 million over five years across the Health and Ageing and Education portfolios in support of the recruitment and training of up to a total of 8,750 nurses across public and private hospitals and aged care as well as funding up to an additional 1,170 ongoing university nursing places per year.

This program will provide:

- A cash bonus of \$6,000, in two payments of \$3,000, at six and eighteen months re-employment, for nurses/midwives to return to the workforce;
- Payments of \$1,000\* per nurse/midwife to the employing hospital or aged care home.

On 5 December 2008, the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon MP, announced that following feedback from stakeholders, and in response to ongoing shortages in the community nursing sector, the BNBW program would be expanded to include community health settings, community-based aged care and day surgery hospitals.

## 1.2 What does the BNBW program aim to achieve?

The aims of the BNBW program are to:

- Reduce the nursing shortages across hospitals, public community health settings, residential aged care homes, and community package aged care services. (eligible facilities)
- Attract 8,750 of the estimated 30,000 qualified nurses who are currently outside the nursing workforce back into nursing; and
- Provide cash bonuses to eligible nurses/midwives who return to work, in eligible facilities as a nurse/midwife under the program.

## 1.3 When does the program start?

The BNBW program was announced by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing on 15 January 2008. Nurses re-entering the workforce on or after this date or on or after 5 December 2008 in an eligible community or day surgery setting, may be eligible to apply for the cash bonuses.

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\* Prior to 5 December 2008 this payment is pro-rata for part-time and casual staff.

## 1.4 How can I find out more about the program?

Access the BNBW page on the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's website ([www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing)) for further information including Fact Sheets. This site will be updated regularly. For further information, please call toll free on 1300 733 314.

## 2. NURSES

### 2.1 Which nurses/midwives are eligible for the program?

Nurses/midwives who have previously been employed as a registered nurse/midwife or enrolled nurse, or a level consistent to these, in Australia may be eligible for the program. There are a number of other requirements that need to be met for eligibility, which are outlined in the following questions and answers. The eligibility requirements are also summarised in '*Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Fact Sheet for Nurses and Midwives*', available from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing website ([www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing)).

### 2.2 What happens if I return to nursing/midwifery and work part-time or on a casual basis under the program?

The bonus payment of \$6,000 is based on a nurse/midwife returning to the workforce full time (as defined by your State/Territory). A nurse/midwife who returns part-time in the aged care sector, and a nurse/midwife who returns part-time or casual in an eligible facility<sup>†</sup> (subject to employment arrangements in the relevant State or Territory) will be eligible for the bonus payments on a pro rata basis (i.e. proportional to the FTE hours worked), provided they meet all program eligibility criteria.

### 2.3 Am I eligible for the program if I have worked as a nurse/midwife periodically over the past 12 months?

Bonuses are only available to registered or enrolled nurses/midwives who have not been employed as a registered or enrolled nurse/midwife in Australia in the previous 12 months. To verify that they are eligible for the program each nurse/midwife will be required to complete an application form and sign a Statutory Declaration, stating that they have not been employed as a registered or enrolled nurse/midwife in the previous 12 months.

Any leave approved by an employer is considered a guarantee of ongoing employment, and counts towards service for the purpose of entitlements. A nurse who had been on

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<sup>†</sup> Eligible facility includes but is not limited to, eligible public and private facilities, community health settings, residential aged care homes, remote health clinics and community package aged care services that are funded by a BNBW program fundholder.

approved leave during the twelve months in question would therefore not be considered eligible for the bonus payments under the BNBW program.

## 2.4 Do I have to be currently registered or enrolled in my State/Territory to be eligible for the program?

Yes. Only nurses/midwives who are registered or enrolled with their relevant State or Territory regulatory authority may be eligible for the bonuses.

The usual State/Territory requirements for registration or enrolment as a nurse/midwife will apply in considering eligibility under this program. This may include refresher courses and retraining programs. Any re-entry requirements need to be completed before the nurse commences the eighteen months employment necessary for the two bonus payments.

## 2.5 Do I have to stay within the same employment sector (i.e. public hospital, private hospital, community health setting residential aged care sector or community package aged care service) for the full 18 months to receive both bonus payments?

If a nurse/midwife chooses to change employment sectors (i.e. move between public, private, community or aged care sectors), or move interstate during the 6 or 18 month period, they would forego one or both of their bonus payments. For example, if a nurse/midwife is initially employed under the BNBW program in a public hospital and then moves to another employment sector position within an eligible facility before the full 18 month period is complete, they will not be eligible to receive the second bonus payment. An individual is only eligible for this program once within the five year period from 2008 to 2013.

## 2.6 What happens if I move between employers in the same sector within the 6 month or 18 month period?

If a nurse/midwife moves from one participating employer to another participating employer in the same sector (for example, from one participating public hospital to another participating public hospital within the same State or Territory), they may be able to transfer their bonus payment entitlements. Nurses/midwives will not be eligible to receive more than one set of bonus payments (up to \$6,000) within the five year period of this program.

## 2.7 Am I able to take leave from my employer whilst I am on the program?

Approved paid leave periods will contribute towards the 6 and 18 month continuous employment periods under the BNBW program. However, unpaid leave will not

contribute towards the 6 and 18 month continuous employment periods or be considered as time not employed as a nurse. Payment of bonuses to nurses/midwives under the BNBW program will be withheld until the nurse/midwife returns from approved, paid leave. Bonus payments may also be withheld pending investigation and resolution of any industrial or registration matter.

## 2.8 I have returned to work as a nurse/midwife full-time but in two separate locations. Am I eligible to receive the full-time bonus payments?

You are only eligible to apply for the bonus payments from one employer, so you will receive bonus payments on a pro-rata basis according to the FTE that you work with that employer.

You should talk to your employer about the details of your eligibility for a place in the program. Forms are available for hospital nurses at: [www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing) and for aged care nurses at, [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au) for you to complete and submit to your employer if you believe you are eligible for the program. Please check with your employer whether there are specific forms applicable for your State or Territory.

## 2.9 I have nursing qualifications but have never been registered or worked as a nurse in Australia. Am I eligible for the program?

No. Only qualified, registered or enrolled nurses/midwives who have previously been employed as a registered or enrolled nurse/midwife in Australia are eligible for this program.

## 2.10 I have returned to work in an eligible facility but have not been offered the bonus. Am I eligible?

A nurse/midwife who can confirm that the eligible facility where they returned to work on or after 15 January 2008 or on or after 5 December 2008 in an eligible community or day surgery setting, has an allocated place available under this program may be eligible to receive bonuses. You should talk to your employer regarding your eligibility for this program, and whether your employer has an allocated place for you. Forms are available for hospital or community nurses at: [www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing) and for aged care nurses at [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au) for you to complete and submit to your employer if you believe you are eligible for this program.

## 2.11 Am I eligible if I am under investigation by the State or Territory regulatory body?

No. A nurse/midwife who is currently under investigation or being sanctioned under the relevant State or Territory regulatory body is not eligible for bonus payments under the program.

## 2.12 Are the bonus payments taxable?

Yes. The \$6,000 (or pro rata equivalent) is considered assessable income for personal taxation purposes under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*, and will be taxed accordingly.

## 2.13 When will the bonus payments be made to each eligible nurse/midwife?

The nurse/midwife bonuses are payable to each eligible nurse/midwife with an allocated place in the program after 6 and 18 months of continuous employment. For example, if an eligible nurse/midwife returned to work in an eligible public hospital on 15 January 2008 they would be eligible to receive the first bonus of \$3,000 (or pro rata equivalent) after 6 months, on 14 July 2008. They would then be eligible for the second bonus after 18 months, on 14 July 2009. Payment dates will need to be negotiated with your employer.

## 2.14 What is the maximum time that nurses/midwives can be out of the workforce to qualify for the program?

There is no maximum time that nurses/midwives can be out of the workforce. Nurses/midwives must not have been employed as a registered nurse/midwife in the past twelve months. Nurses need to go through the normal procedures for registration, whether they have been out of the workforce for only a short time or longer. Normal State/Territory retraining and refresher requirements for registration will apply.

## 2.15 How can I apply for the bonus payments?

Forms are available for hospital and community health setting nurses at: [www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing) and for aged care nurses at, [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au) for you to complete and submit to your employer. You are encouraged to contact your employer / potential employer to inquire about places and application processes under the program and to confirm if there are specific forms applicable in your State or Territory.

# 3. ORGANISATIONS - GENERAL

## 3.1 Which organisations are eligible to participate in the BNBW program?

The following organisations may be eligible to participate in the BNBW program:

- Declared public hospital, including day surgery;
- Declared private hospital, including day surgery;
- Community health setting funded by a BNBW fundholder;
- Community package aged care service, and

- Residential aged care home.

'Declared' means a facility that has been declared a hospital under subsection 121-5 of the Private Health Insurance Act 2007.

### 3.2 Will the employer be required to report information under this program?

The program will be monitored by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. Each participating eligible facility will collect information to assist the BNBW fundholder to meet the minimum data set requirements for the Program.

### 3.3 If a nurse changes employer part way through the 18 months period, does the initial employer lose their bonus?

If an eligible nurse/midwife leaves their original place of employment part way through the 6 or 18 month period of continuous employment, the employer will not have to return the \$1,000 cash bonus.

### 3.4 At what point will the employer receive the \$1,000 bonus?

An eligible employer will receive the \$1,000 payment from the relevant State/Territory or administering organisation on lodgement of an application after employing an eligible nurse into an allocated place under the program. Agreements will be made with each State/Territory and administering organisation to ensure objectives are delivered and accountabilities addressed.

### 3.5 Will organisations have to pay the returning nurses their two bonus payments?

Public hospitals will be required to pay the eligible nurse/midwife their bonuses under this Program from funds provided to them by the relevant State/Territory Health Department.

Public community health settings will be required to pay the eligible nurse/midwife their bonuses under this Program from funds provided to them by the relevant State/Territory health department.

Private hospitals and associated community settings will be required to pay the eligible nurse/midwife their bonuses under this Program from funds provided to them by the Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) and the Department of Health and Ageing who are administering the Program.

The Department of Health and Ageing has funding agreements in place with private hospital organisations and networks, and has a funding agreement in place with the RCNA to administer the program to independent and non-affiliated private hospitals.

### 3.6 The program covers hospitals and residential aged care homes. Does the program cover other kinds of health services, such as community health services?

Yes, the Australian Government has expanded its Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Program on 5 December to include community package aged care, public community health settings, community services funded by BNBW fundholders, and day surgery hospitals.

## 4. PUBLIC HOSPITALS

### 4.1 How many nursing places will be allocated to each public hospital?

Each State and Territory has been allocated a number of full time equivalent places based on population share. Public hospitals can negotiate with the relevant State or Territory health departments regarding allocations that they are entitled to receive under this program.

## 5. COMMUNITY SETTINGS

### 5.1 How will the public community setting places be allocated?

Each State and Territory and Private Hospital organisation has been allocated a number of full time equivalent places. Community setting places are included in these allocations.

## 6. PRIVATE HOSPITALS

### 6.1 How will the private hospital places be allocated?

Private hospital places have been allocated using a market share approach. Private hospitals should contact their Group administrator to determine their allocation of places. Independent and non-affiliated private hospitals should contact the RCNA at [www.rcna.org.au](http://www.rcna.org.au) or on 1800 553 252.

## **7. RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE HOMES AND COMMUNITY PACKAGE AGED CARE SERVICES**

### **7.1 Which residential aged care homes and community package aged care services are eligible employers under this program?**

A service providing residential aged care or community package aged care for which it is in receipt of subsidy under Chapter 3 of the *Aged Care Act 1997* is an eligible service for the purpose of this initiative.

### **7.2 How many nurses may I employ and receive payments for under this program?**

Commencing in 2008, this program seeks to re-enter 1,000 eligible nurses into employment in residential aged care homes and community package aged care services. Places will be allocated on a first in basis.

### **7.3 Who is responsible for determining the eligibility of a nurse under this program?**

Employers are required to ensure that nurses they propose employing under this program are eligible for bonus payments. If the employer has any concerns regarding eligibility then they are advised to contact the Royal College of Nursing Australia via the website <http://www.rcna.org.au/>.

### **7.4 Can employers choose to apply additional criteria/priorities to eligibility and selection?**

Eligible employers are responsible under the *Aged Care Act 1997* to determine the staff mix required to meet the care needs of their residents. Therefore, eligible employers are to prioritise their recruitment arrangements in order to meet their legislative requirements. This includes full or part time, or registered or enrolled nurse status.

### **7.5 Can nurses be employed on a part time basis under this program?**

Whilst the preference of this program is to return nurses to employment in a full time capacity (based on 35 hours per week), eligible nurses can be employed on a part time basis. However, the nurse bonus (\$6,000) will be provided on a pro rata basis if not engaged full time.

Employers should consider carefully the number of hours that part time nurses work under this initiative. It is suggested that 0.4 of a full time equivalent would be the minimum level of hours for a nurse to be an effective addition to the residential aged care home or community package aged care nursing team.

## 7.6 Can nurses be employed with multiple eligible employers?

Nurses may be employed with multiple eligible employers. However, the employer's bonus payment will only be paid to the first employer. Subsequent employers will not be eligible for the employer bonus and nurses are only eligible to apply for the bonus payment from one employer.

## 7.7 When is the \$1,000 employer bonus paid?

Eligible residential aged care homes and community package aged care services will receive the \$1,000 from the relevant administering organisation on lodgement of an application after employing an eligible nurse into an allocated place under the program. Agreements have been made with each administering organisation to ensure objectives are delivered and accountabilities addressed.

## 7.8 What is required from the employer in relation to the \$1,000 employer bonus?

Employers are required to assist eligible nurses employed under this program with relevant re-skilling and re-training programs deemed suitable in supporting the nurse to re-enter the workforce.

Whilst the hospital sector has a number of re-entry or re-fresher programs available, the aged care sector as a whole does not. The following list of training themes has been developed in consultation with the Australian Nursing Federation, Aged and Community Services Australia, and Aged Care Association Australia and may assist employers and returning nurses in developing any re-skilling and re-training programs:

- introduction to residential aged care;
- occupational health and safety;
- medication management; and
- chronic ill health in the older person.

It is expected that employers and returning nurses will work together to develop any proposed training program.

## 7.9 Is the \$1,000 employer bonus regarded as taxable income?

Both the nurse bonus (\$6,000 or pro rata equivalent) and employer bonus (\$1,000) is considered as assessable under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*, and will be taxed accordingly.

Employers may seek independent financial advice as to how this affects their individual circumstances.

## 7.10 What happens if the nurse changes employers?

If the nurse changes their employment to another or additional eligible residential aged care home or community package aged care service, so long as employment is continuous with no break in employment, then this employment counts towards the nurse's eligibility period if the facility is participating. However, if the nurse leaves the aged care sector then any future entitlement is forfeited.

## 7.11 Where can I go for further information?

Access the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's website ([www.health.gov.au/backtonursing](http://www.health.gov.au/backtonursing)) for further information.

## 7.12 Where does the employer/employee go for assistance if there is a disagreement between the two parties in relation to this program?

If there is a significant disagreement between the employer and the employee in relation to the eligibility and entitlements under this program, the employer is urged to contact the administrator, the RCNA, in the first instance, then the Department of Health and Ageing at [BacktoNursing@health.gov.au](mailto:BacktoNursing@health.gov.au) as soon as practical in order to resolve the issue and to not disadvantage either the employer or employee.

## 7.13 Is the employer required to report information under this program?

The program will be administered by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. The program fundholder will collect and provide the following minimum data on a nurse returning to the workforce:

- the employing body location (i.e. metropolitan, regional, rural or remote);
- the type of facility (e.g. general hospital, acute mental health, residential aged care home, public community health setting or day surgery);
- the allocated place;
- the number of nurses employed under the program;
- the registration status of those nurses (i.e. registered or enrolled nurse);
- commencement dates and the number of hours each nurse is to be employed each week;
- whether the nurse completed or is completing a refresher or re-entry program; and
- payment of bonuses.

## 7.14 What support will the Australian Government provide for the implementation and administration of the program

Pro formas for nurses to apply for eligibility, as well as for organisation reporting have been developed to support the program.

## **Glossary**

### **Allocated Places**

means the nurse/midwife places available under the Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce program.

### **Community Health Settings**

means a community based service that is funded by a Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce fundholder. These may include, but are not limited to palliative care, mental health, school based services, maternal and child health and home visiting services where an Eligible Nurse/Midwife is employed to undertake nursing duties.

### **Community package aged care service**

a service providing residential aged care for which it is in receipt of a subsidy under Chapter 3 of the *Aged Care Act 1997* is an eligible service for the purpose of this initiative.

### **Eligible Nurse/Midwife**

means a nurse/midwife who meets the eligibility requirements set out in the Policy Implementation Principles.

### **Eligible Facility**

includes, but is not limited to, eligible public and private hospitals, community health settings, residential aged care facilities, remote health clinics and community package aged care services that receive funding from Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Program Fundholders.

### **Eligible Public Facility**

includes, but is not limited to, eligible public hospitals, community health settings, and remote health clinics that receive funding from a Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Fundholder.

### **Eligible Private Facility**

includes, but is not limited to, eligible private hospitals, community health settings, and remote health clinics that receive funding from a Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Fundholder.

### **Eligible Public Hospital**

means a Declared public hospital, where the hospital provides treatment that may include day surgery. 'Declared' means a facility that has been declared a hospital under subsection 121-5 of the *Private Health Insurance Act 2007*;

### **Eligible Private Hospital**

means a Declared private hospital, where the hospital provides treatment that may include day surgery. 'Declared' means a facility that has been declared a hospital under subsection 121-5 of the *Private Health Insurance Act 2007*;

### **Full Time Equivalent (FTE)**

means number of hours per week as it applies to employment conditions in the eligible facility employing a nurse/midwife under the program.

### **Fundholder**

means an organisation or State or Territory Health Department who has a Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to manage part of the Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce program.

**Eligible Facility Payment**

means a cash payment by a Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Fundholder to an eligible facility.

**Nurse/Midwife Bonus**

means a cash payment by the eligible facility to the eligible Nurse/Midwife.

**Residential Aged Care Home**

A service providing residential aged care for which it is in receipt of subsidy under Chapter 3 or the *Aged Care Act 1997* is an eligible service for the purpose of this initiative.