

Bonded Medical Program

Program Update 27 July 2021



Australian Government
Department of Health

www.health.gov.au

Overview

Issues

Update on progress

Q&A

Legacy Schemes:

- Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme
- Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme

Bonded Medical Program (the Program)

- Statutory requirements



Issue – Timeframes and the Program

The legislation allows 18 years from completion of a course of study in medicine at an Australian university to complete the RoSO.

Early program materials advised participants that they would have 18 years from opt in to complete the RoSO. This was incorrect. Information was then later corrected.

Some legacy scheme participants, if opted in, may not have had time to complete their obligations within 18 years from completing their course of study in medicine and faced penalties under the legislation.

Issue – Opt in processes

Under the legislation, specific administration steps are required for a participant to opt in to the Program.

Due to Departmental errors in 2020 with the opt in process, some participants were not correctly bonded under the new statutory Program. Opt in processes were paused in mid-2020.

More than 2000 participants were contacted on 16 March 2021. Around half were waiting to opt in.

As notified in March 2021, these participants remain on their legacy scheme and are bound by their current contract or deed of agreement.

Progress

Work is well underway. We will be in contact with affected individuals to advise that their case has been allocated to a case manager.

The Department must work with each affected individual to understand their personal circumstances and accommodate these into the outcome.

The Department is prioritising those individuals who had opted in to the new statutory program, but weren't correctly bonded. This includes those that thought they had completed their obligations and exited the program.

We are seeking to ensure this is done correctly and that a no disadvantage approach is applied to each and every participant.

It will take us time to complete this and we appreciate your patience.

Issue – Waiting to opt in and waiting for a response

Opt in processes were paused in mid-2020.

More than 2000 participants were contacted on 16 March 2021. Around half were waiting to opt in.

We apologise for the delay in responding to these requests.

The Department is working through cases as quickly as possible.

Progress

Work is well underway. For individuals who are waiting to opt in, it is important that they continue to comply with the requirements of their legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement.

For those individuals who received the 16 March 2021 email, the Department will work with the affected individual to fully understand their personal circumstances from 2020 to now.

This will ensure that any unintended consequences or breaches are managed. Fundamental to this approach is that there will be no disadvantage.

The Department acknowledges the frustration caused by this delay and is working towards progressing all requests as quickly as possible.

Issue – MRBS deferrals and changes to work circumstances in 2021

For individuals waiting to opt in and who wish to work in areas which are not eligible for RoSO under their legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement, the Department can assist by providing deferrals of RoSO obligations.

MRBS Scheme participants who are seeking a **change to work activities which are not eligible** for RoSO under their **current contract, must obtain approval** for deferral of RoSO or a simultaneous work approval **before commencing work** in the ineligible area.

Under the legislation, the Department cannot approve retrospective deferrals for MRBS Scheme participants.

However, participants who have obtained Fellowship can be given simultaneous work approval to enable them to work in ineligible areas whilst also meeting their RoSO requirements.

Progress

We wrote to fellowed MRBS participants on 21 June 2021 asking affected participants to email the Department their request for deferral as soon as possible.

We worked closely with affected doctors to execute many Deeds of Variation by 30 June 2021.

We are continuing to work with other legacy scheme participants who may require deferrals or simultaneous work approvals in coming months.

It is important that individuals continue to comply with the requirements of their legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement and notify the Department in advance if any changes are required.

Issue - Breaches

The Department understands the concerns felt by doctors who either were not correctly bonded or that expressed interest in the Program and await a response.

The Department recognises that legacy scheme participants may have undertaken service which is eligible work for the purposes of the RoSO under the statutory Program but not under their MRBS or BMP Scheme.

These participants may have breached the conditions of their existing contract or deed of agreement.

Progress

Individuals should continue working as they are now, without being concerned about breaches of their legacy scheme agreement.

The Department recognises that, since implementation of the Program commenced, some individuals may have taken action with the assumption they were, or would be, correctly bonded under the Program.

Any eligible work (i.e. work completed that is compliant with the requirements of the Program) completed in good faith, will be counted towards the RoSO to ensure 'no disadvantage' to participants.

The no disadvantage approach will also include managing any breaches that may have occurred, including the waiver of any financial liability associated with this issue.

Issue – Delays in responding to email requests

The Department acknowledges the extensive delays in responding to inquiries and emails.

Steps have been taken to address outstanding requests for issues associated with existing agreements.

We continue to work through the hundreds of emails we receive each week.

We are aware of the concerns about the timeliness of responses and the frustration this causes.

Due to the number of inquiries on hand, it will take time for the Department to work through more recent requests.

Progress

All emails received prior to 16 March 2021 have been actioned.

For some requests, the Department has contacted the individual concerned to notify them of progress and/or the steps to resolve their request.

Given high volume of enquiries across multiple programs/mailboxes, the Department has established one mailbox to streamline enquiry management.

We are seeking your cooperation to have your requests managed well into the future.

Progress

This involves following a new naming process. When emailing us, you must follow a standard subject/title approach

(e.g. MRBS – John Smith – simultaneous work approval)

Your subject line must include:

Program/Scheme name

Participant name

Main request/requirement

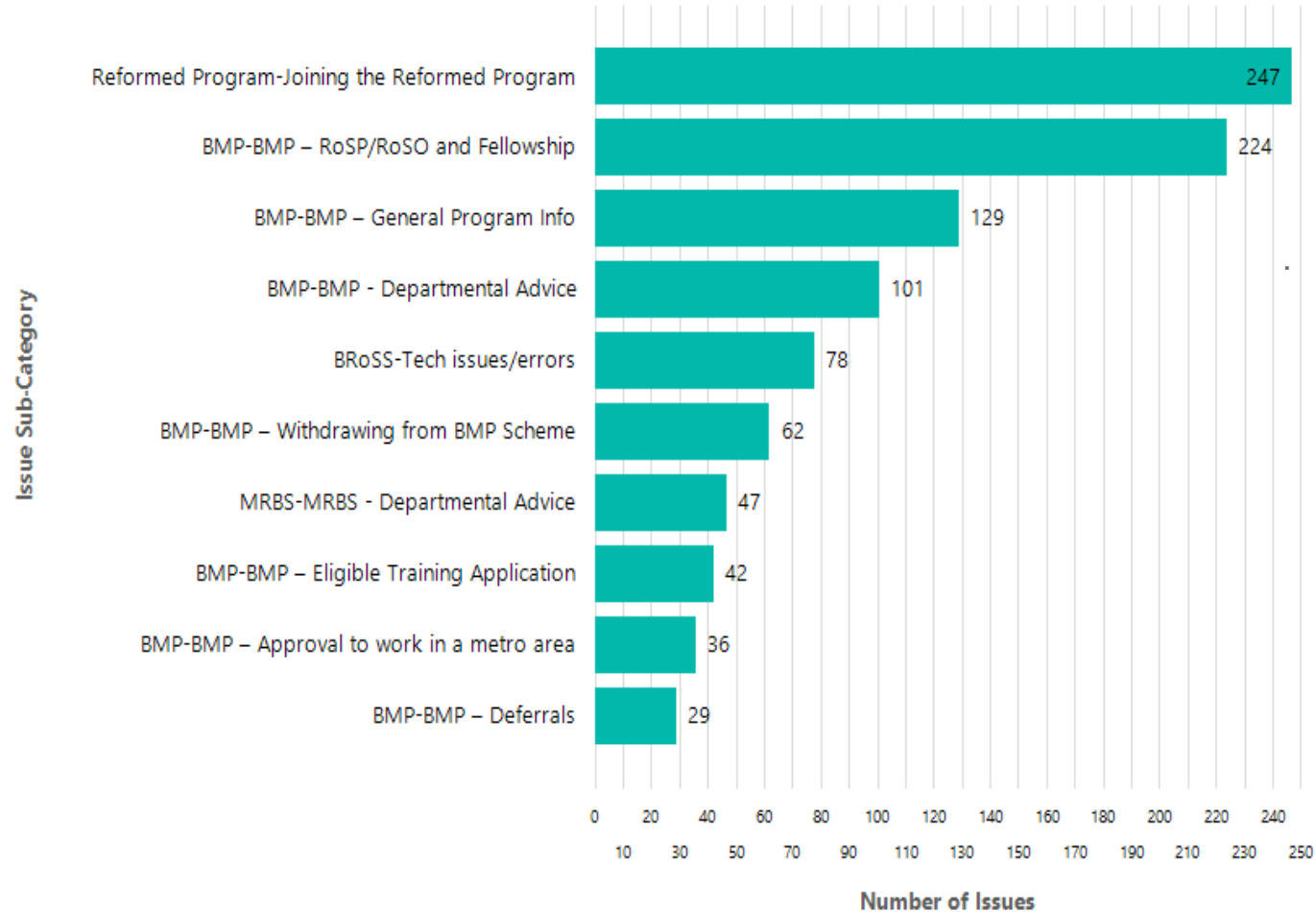
(ROSO/Fellowship/eligible location/deferral....)

We are also working to improve our call centre and direct support channels so it is clearer which you should go to with which type of request.

Top 10 issues – calls to the Department’s contact centre

Call Centre Enquiries

16/03/2021 to 20/07/2021



Where to go for further information

WEBINARS

- Further Program information webinars will be hosted by the Department in coming months

WEBSITE

- www.Health.gov.au or search for '*Bonded Medical Program*'
- Monthly Program updates and more information available

CALL CENTRE

- The Department's call centre is available for general inquiries 1800 987 104 (Mon–Fri 8:30am – 5:00pm AEST)

EMAIL US

- For more specific queries about your arrangements
- BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au
- Subject: (*Scheme/Program*): (*Your name*): (*Request type*)



How long will the Department take to resolve all the issues?

The Department is doing everything possible to resolve the issues and opt in affected individuals as quickly as possible.

Due to the number of cases involved, and the need to fully understand the personal circumstances of each affected individual, it will take time for the Department to work through each individual case on a no disadvantage basis.

At key points in the process, the Department may require additional information from the individual or require the individual to re-confirm their interest to opt in to the Program.

The timeframe to complete each case will depend, in part, on the time that the individual takes to consider, seek advice and then respond to requests sent from the Department.

Q & A



I did not receive the March 2021 email and I believe I am one of the affected individuals, what should I do?

The 16 March 2021 email was sent only to those known to be affected by the issues with the opt in process, according to the Department's records.

If any individual believes they should have received an email please email:

BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au

Using:

Subject: *(Scheme/Program): (Name): (Request type)*

Q & A



I was told by the Department that I had been opted in to the Program.

I am therefore working in an area eligible under the Program, but ineligible under my legacy scheme.

Will my RoSO count?

We will ensure that any work activities completed in good faith, consistent with the requirements of the Program, will be counted towards the RoSO.

The Department will work with affected individuals to fully understand their personal circumstances from 2020 to now.

As part of this process, affected individuals may be asked to provide more information such as any work activities undertaken since they were not correctly bonded.

Q & A



I expressed interest to opt in a while ago and I am still waiting for a response. When will I hear from the Department?

The Department acknowledges the delay in responding to those requests during 2020 to opt in. The Department has prioritised individuals that were not bonded correctly.

It remains important that individuals continue to comply with the requirements of their legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement.

If individuals are considering a change to work activities in the next few months, please ensure changes won't breach your current agreement.

If unclear, then get in touch with the Department.

Q & A



What happens if I am in breach?

The Department recognises that some affected individuals may have taken actions with the assumption they were, or would be, correctly bonded under the Program.

If, in changing their work activities, an individual has breached their legacy scheme agreement, we will take a no disadvantage approach. The Department will seek to manage that breach, including removal of any possible Medicare ban and waiver of any associated financial liability.

The Department understands you are concerned and is working hard to address cases and your concerns.

Q & A



Will you count the work I have undertaken to fulfill my RoSO?

If you have been waiting to opt in and have undertaken RoSO that is not compliant with your existing agreement but compliant with the Program, we will take this into account when processing your request to opt in to the Program.

We will ensure that any work activities completed in good faith, consistent with the requirements of the Program, will be counted towards your RoSO.

Affected individuals may be asked to provide more information such as detail on any work activities undertaken since they were not correctly bonded.

Q & A



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