

District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) 2018 Update.

Question - What is a District of Workforce Shortage?

Answer: In broad terms, a DWS is a geographic area where the local residential population has less access to Medicare-subsidised medical services than the national average. The Government makes DWS determinations impartially to encourage a more equitable distribution of medical services across Australia.

Question – What does being a DWS area mean?

Answer: Some doctors, such as overseas trained doctors (OTDs), foreign graduates of an Australian medical school (FGAMS), and Australian trained bonded doctors with return of service obligations are subject to a requirement to work in a DWS to access the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS). If an area is recognised as DWS, local practices can employ these doctors to increase the workforce and thereby improve the community's access to medical services that are subsidised by MBS fees. This is how DWS determinations are used to improve the geographic distribution of doctors.

Question – Is my community a DWS area?

Answer: Check the DoctorConnect website for the latest update. Please ensure you click 'Refresh' or 'Reload' in your web browser to ensure you are viewing the latest version of the DWS locator and not a cached version.

Question – Why is my community not considered DWS?

Answer: Inner Metropolitan areas are automatically non-DWS areas, see the Metropolitan layer on the DoctorConnect website. All other areas are subject to DWS considerations. If your area is not inner metropolitan area and does not have DWS status, the Department of Health has determined that your community has a substantially better population-to-GP ratio than the national average.

Question – The DWS status of my area changed before I completed my recruitment - what do I do?

Answer: If you commenced recruitment negotiations with either an OTD or FGAMS while your area was a DWS, you can continue your recruitment activity. There are provisions in the relevant Medicare legislation that allow recruitment activities to continue. For further advice, please contact the Access Programs Section of Health by emailing: 19AB@health.gov.au.

Question – can I apply for DWS status?

Answer: No. DWS is determined impartially and there is no process for the Government to grant discretionary DWS status.

The non-DWS status of an area does not completely restrict the employment of additional doctors. The majority of Australian trained doctors are not subject to DWS restrictions. The

MBS rules also include provisions for OTDs and FGAMS to work as after-hours doctors or as full-time locums for up to six months. There are also many OTDs and FGAMS who have discharged their DWS restrictions and who hold postgraduate medical qualifications that allow them to work on an unrestricted basis at locations of their choice.

Question – When will my area be reconsidered against the DWS rules?

Answer: In February 2017, the Government expanded the locations that automatically qualify as a DWS on the basis of their remoteness classification. This change means that more rural and regional areas qualify as DWS and become eligible employment locations for doctors who would otherwise be restricted in their ability to work under the MBS.

For those areas that do not automatically qualify on the basis of the remoteness considerations, DWS status is reconsidered annually to account for changes in the composition and geographic distribution of the medical workforce. The next update is currently scheduled for February 2019.

As part of the update process, the Department of Health will compare the latest Medicare billing information and residential population statistics. These information sources are used to determine which areas have the most acute needs for more doctors by:

- creating a doctor-to-population ratio for each local area;
- creating a national average doctor-to-population ratio; and
- examining whether residents of the local area have less access to doctors when compared to the national average. Those areas that have less access than the national average will qualify as DWS.

Question – My community is having difficulties recruiting and retaining GPs – what is the Government doing to assist me?

The Government funds a network of seven Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs) in each state and the Northern Territory to provide assistance to communities that experience difficulties attracting and retaining health professionals into regional, rural and remote areas located in MM2 – 7. See below contact details:

State	Agency	Contact
NSW	New South Wales Rural Doctors Network	Ph: (02) 4924 8000 www.nswrdn.com.au
Vic	Rural Workforce Agency Victoria	Ph: (03) 9349 7800 www.rwav.com.au
Qld	Health Workforce Queensland	Ph: (07) 3105 7800 www.healthworkforce.com.au
SA	Rural Doctors Workforce SA	Ph: (08) 8234 8277 www.ruraldoc.com.au
WA	Rural Health West	Ph: (08) 6389 4500 www.ruralhealthwest.com.au
Tas	HR+	Ph: (03) 6332 8600 www.hrplustas.com.au
NT	Health Networks Northern Territory	Ph: (08) 8982 1000 www.ntphn.org.au