



## Directing doctors to areas of greatest need

The **Visas for General Practitioners (GPs)** Program helps increase access to GP services in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. The Program encourages overseas doctors to seek positions in communities most in need of primary health care services.

From 11 March 2019, employers of overseas doctors seeking employer sponsored visas to work in Australia are required to obtain a Health Workforce Certificate (HWC) from a Rural Workforce Agency (RWA). For non-hospital based (primary health care) positions, HWCs will only be issued for positions located in areas where there is genuine need for additional primary health care services. These areas are determined using the Department of Health's Assessment Tool and the Distribution Priority Area classification. From 16 December 2020, hospital employers are able to apply for a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate (HWEC) which can be used repeatedly within a 12 month period to nominate overseas doctors seeking temporary and provisional employer sponsored visas. HWECs will only be issued to hospital employers for hospital based positions.

### Requirements for employers

Employers (including hospital employers) nominating a position that will be filled by a doctor who needs an employer sponsored visa to work in Australia are required to obtain a HWC or a HWEC from a RWA. For non-hospital based positions, a HWC is issued by a RWA only where there is a genuine need to fill a primary health care position at a given location. An appropriate HWC or HWEC is required for all employer sponsored visa nominations in the following three occupations:

- General Practitioner (ANZSCO 253111)
- Resident Medical Officer (ANZSCO 253112)
- Medical Practitioner not elsewhere classified (ANZSCO 253999).

Hospital employers need to provide a HWEC when nominating overseas doctors for Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) and Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) visas. HWECs are valid for 12 months and hospital employers are able to use the same HWEC repeatedly within the 12 month validity period to nominate overseas doctors for these temporary and provisional employer sponsored visas in the three occupations above.

Note: a separate HWEC is required by hospital employers to nominate overseas doctors in each of the three occupations above.

A single use HWC is still required by hospital employers when nominating overseas doctors for permanent Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) or Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187) visas.

Employers are required to attach the appropriate HWC or HWEC to their nomination application for the following employer sponsored visas:

- Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) visa
- Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) visa
- Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) visa
- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187) visa.

Table 1 below specifies the appropriate certification required for each employer sponsored visa and position nomination.

**Table 1: Appropriate certification required for nomination of the following visas and positions.**

| <b>Employer Sponsored visas</b>                                  | <b>Primary care positions</b> | <b>Hospital based positions</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482)                    | HWC                           | HWEC                            |
| Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (subclass 494) | HWC                           | HWEC                            |
| Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186)                  | HWC                           | HWC                             |
| Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) (subclass 187)        | HWC                           | HWC                             |

A visa will not be granted if an employer does not include the appropriate HWC or HWEC in the visa nomination application to the Department of Home Affairs.

### **Requirements for overseas doctors**

Overseas doctors, located both within and outside Australia, who are applying for an employer sponsored temporary, provisional or permanent residence visa in one of the three occupations above, require their sponsoring employer to obtain the appropriate HWC or HWEC and submit it as part of the visa nomination application.

A visa will not be granted if an employer does not include the appropriate HWC or HWEC in the visa nomination application to the Department of Home Affairs.

### **Fast-tracked Health Workforce Certificates**

Fast-tracked HWCs are available for the following positions:

- Overseas doctors working in hospital based positions.
- Overseas doctors already working in Australia who require an employer sponsored visa to continue to work in their current position, in the same location and with the same employer. (Employers must be able to demonstrate that the doctor who is in a position of continuing employment has been practicing at the nominated location for at least 12 months. See the Visas for GPs [Program Guidelines](#) for further information.)
- Overseas doctors working in an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS).
- Overseas doctors with basic medical qualifications from an Australian university (Australian trained international graduates) who require an employer sponsored visa.
- Overseas doctors working in an Approved Medical Deputising Service (AMDS) as a 3GA program participant.

### **Assessment of non-hospital based positions**

RWAs determine whether a nominated position is located in an area of genuine need for additional primary health care services by using:

- the Department of Health's Health Workforce Planning Tool (the Assessment Tool); and
- the [Distribution Priority Area \(DPA\)](#) classification of the position's location.

RWAs assess positions and provide an endorsement by issuing a HWC where there is a genuine need for additional primary health care services.

RWAs do not assess overseas doctors' suitability for a visa.

The assessment and endorsement process is designed to be fair and non-discriminatory.

## Applying for a Health Workforce Certificate or a Health Workforce Exemption Certificate

To apply for a HWC or HWEC, employers need to complete an online form available at [visasforgps.com.au](https://visasforgps.com.au). Alternatively, employers can request an electronic application form to complete and submit to [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au).

### Health Workforce Certificates

- A HWC must:
  - specify the nominated doctor's name and date of birth
  - specify the position in which the doctor is to work
  - specify the location of the position
  - specify the nominated occupation.
- HWCs must be used prior to the expiry date printed on the certificate.
- HWCs can only be used once for the position nominated by the employer.
- The doctor named on a HWC must be the doctor nominated by the employer for an employer sponsored visa.

If there is any change in circumstance after a HWC has been issued and prior to lodging with Home Affairs, employers should contact the RWA for advice.

### Health Workforce Exemption Certificates

- A HWEC must:
  - specify the nominated occupation
  - specify the name of the employer who is nominating the position
  - specify the name and location of each hospital
  - have been issued during the 12 months ending when the nomination is made.
- A separate HWEC is required for each of the three occupations above.
- A single HWEC can be used repeatedly throughout the 12 month validity period.
- Up to four (4) hospital locations can be included on a single HWEC.

### Further information

The Visas for GPs Program is managed by HR Plus Tasmania on behalf of the network of RWAs. HR Plus Tasmania organise processing of applications and issue HWCs and HWECs to employers as a PDF attachment in an email. Employers will be contacted by HR Plus Tasmania if their application for a HWC or a HWEC is declined.

Employers can contact HR Plus Tasmania on 1800 022 000 or at [visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au](mailto:visasforgps@hrplustas.com.au) for further information about the Visas for GPs Program.

Further information about the Visas for GPs Program is also available at [visasforgps.com.au](https://visasforgps.com.au) and in the Visas for GPs [Program Guidelines](#).