



## April 2021 update on the Bonded Medical Program

To avoid unintended impacts on participants, in June 2020, opt ins to the statutory Bonded Medical Program (the Program) for legacy scheme participants were placed on hold while the Department clarified the Program completion timeframes and other aspects of the opt in process.

On 16 March 2021 the Department emailed more than 2000 individuals advising them of the issues that arose during the early implementation of the program and offering them a choice to opt in to the new statutory Program or to remain in their Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme or Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme.

### What were the issues?

The first issue relates to the timeframe to complete Return of Service Obligation (RoSO). The legislation allows 18 years from completion of a course of study in medicine at an Australian university to complete the RoSO.

Some early program materials advised participants that they would have 18 years from opt in to complete the RoSO. This was incorrect and the information was then corrected. What this means is that some participants from legacy schemes who, if they chose to be bonded under the statutory Program, may not have time to complete their obligations within 18 years from completing their course of study in medicine.

The second issue concerns the opt in process. Under the legislation, specific opt in steps are required. Due to issues with the opt in process, participants from the MRBS Scheme and BMP Scheme have not been correctly bonded under the new statutory Program. These participants remain in their MRBS or BMP scheme and are bound by their current contract or deed of agreement respectively. This may mean that participants have undertaken RoSO which is eligible under the Program but not under their MRBS or BMP scheme or participants have breached the conditions of their contract or deed of agreement.

### How will the Department resolve these issues?

On 16 March 2021 the Department emailed more than 2000 individuals advising them of the issues and offering them a choice to opt in to the new statutory Program or to remain in their Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme or Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme.

The Department will work closely with participants who were **incorrectly bonded** into the new statutory Program, including those who thought they had completed their obligations and exited the program.

The Department will contact these individuals to understand their personal circumstances and to ensure any unintended consequences are addressed. This could include managing any breach that may have occurred and making amendments to their contract or deed of

agreement to recognise any RoSO completed. The Department will take a no disadvantage approach to each of these individuals.

The Department also wrote to those individuals who **expressed their interest** to opt in to the Program and were awaiting a response. The Department acknowledges the delay. It is important that these individuals continue to comply with the requirements of their legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement.

## How long will it take the Department to work its way through the issues?

Due to the number of cases involved, it will take time for the Department to work through each individual case.

The Department is continuing to work with the Implementation Working Group, which includes member representatives from the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA). This regular engagement is intended to keep all involved informed and address arising concerns.

In addition to the general information about the statutory Bonded Medical Program, the Department will provide progress updates on its [website](#).

## Should I keep working where I am if this affects me?

Doctors who were **incorrectly bonded** into the Program should continue to work as they are now, without being concerned about the consequences of breaching their contract or deed of agreement.

## I have not received an email

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 you believe you should have received an email please email [BRoSS@health.gov.au](mailto:BRoSS@health.gov.au).

## I haven't heard from the Department of Health recently

Participants in the MRBS and BMP schemes have reporting obligations to the Department. The first of these is to notify the Department of any change to contact details. The Department uses email in the first instance to correspond with bonded participants.

If you are a participant in the MRBS scheme please refer to your contract for reporting obligations. If you are a participant in the BMP scheme please refer to your deed of agreement for reporting obligations.

Participants in the statutory Bonded Medical Program will soon have access to the Bonded Return of Service System (BRoSS) and will be able to self-manage their participation in the Program. Participants who wish to keep their Program reporting obligations up-to-date may email [BRoSS@health.gov.au](mailto:BRoSS@health.gov.au).

## Contact details for further information

Contact the Department of Health

Telephone: 1800 987 104 (Monday – Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm AEST)

**Email:** [BRoSS@health.gov.au](mailto:BRoSS@health.gov.au)