



Frequently Asked Questions

Issues arising from early implementation of the Bonded Medical Program. Participants under legacy schemes who were not bonded correctly or have expressed an interest to opt in and are waiting for a response

What were the issues that led to the Program being put on hold in June 2020?

The first issue relates to the timeframe to complete the 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 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 Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme and Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme have not been correctly bonded under the new Program.

What does it mean if I was not bonded correctly?

It means that, due to Departmental errors in 2020 with the opt in process, the specific steps that are required under the legislation were not followed correctly.

Those participants who were not bonded correctly remain subject to the requirements of 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.

The Department will work with each individual to understand their personal circumstances and ensure that any unintended consequences or breaches are managed. Fundamental to this approach is that there will be no disadvantage for participants that were not correctly bonded.

What is the Department doing to resolve these issues?

The Department will contact affected individuals to advise when their case has been allocated to a case manager.

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

Each individual's case is allocated to a case manager for review. All cases are handled on an individual basis with individual circumstances, legacy scheme requirements and individual contracts or deeds of agreement needing to be reviewed.

Individuals will be contacted by the Department and may be asked to provide more information such as any work activities undertaken since they were not correctly bonded. 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 each affected individual to ensure that any unintended consequences or breaches are managed. Fundamental to this approach is that there will be no disadvantage for participants that were not correctly bonded.

Depending on individual circumstances, this could include the Department making amendments to the agreement and removal of any possible Medicare ban and waiver of any associated financial liability. At the conclusion of this process, the affected individual will be advised of the outcome.

Once the individual has confirmed their intent to opt in, the Department will complete the necessary processes to correctly bond them under the Program.

What does “no disadvantage” mean?

The Department recognises that, since implementation of the Bonded Medical Program commenced, some individuals that were not bonded correctly may have taken actions 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 to ensure ‘no disadvantage’ to participants as a result of delays to the opt in process.

When managing the circumstances of affected individuals that were not bonded correctly, the no disadvantage approach includes seeking to count eligible work towards RoSO and managing any breaches that may have occurred, including waiver of any associated financial liability.

When did the Department first notify individuals about the 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 Program or to remain in their legacy scheme (being either the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme or Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme).

I have not received an email

The 16 March 2021 email was sent only to those individual 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 bondedmedicalprogram@health.gov.au. When emailing your enquiry please use the following naming convention to help us quickly categorise and address your requests.

Subject line: '(Scheme/Program): (Your name) : (Request type)'

I don't know if am one of the affected individuals that were not correctly bonded. How do I find out?

If you are one of the affected individuals, you should have received an email from the Department on 16 March 2021. We will let you know as soon as your case has been allocated to a case manager.

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.

If you are one of the affected individuals, you should continue to work as you are now, without being concerned about the consequences of breaching your contract or deed of agreement.

If you are not amongst those that were not correctly bonded, but you did express interest in opting in to the Program and are awaiting a response, you should continue to comply with the requirements of your legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement.

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 on my legacy scheme. Will my RoSO count?

The Department will work with each affected individual who believed they were correctly bonded under the Program, to fully understand their personal circumstances from 2020 till now. This will ensure that any unintended consequences or breaches are managed. Fundamental to this approach is that there will be no disadvantage.

As part of this process, affected individuals may be asked to provide more information such as any work activities undertaken since they sought to opt in.

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

I expressed an interest to opt in and I am still waiting for a response. When can I expect to hear from the Department about my situation?

On 16 March 2021, the Department emailed over 2000 individuals who expressed their interest to opt in to the Program and were waiting for a response. The email advised of the issues and offered the choice to opt in to the new Program or to remain in their legacy scheme (being either the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme or Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme).

The Department acknowledges the delay in responding to those requests to opt in – and others received more recently – from legacy scheme participants.

If you received the email of 16 March 2021 and expressed your interest to opt in but have not heard back from the Department yet, it is important that you continue to comply with the requirements of your legacy scheme contract or deed of agreement.

If you are considering a change to your work activities in the next few months, you should take measures to ensure that any change you make won't breach your current agreement.

Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme participants

If you are an MRBS Scheme participant and considering a change to your work activities which are not eligible for RoSO under your contract, you must obtain approval for deferral of RoSO or a simultaneous work approval before commencing work in the ineligible area.

It is important that you send an email to the Department as soon as possible at:

BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au with

'MRBS Scheme – [Name] – Request for Deferral/Simultaneous Work Approval' as the subject.

Bonded Medical Places (BMP) Scheme participants

If you are a BMP Scheme participant and considering a change to your work activities which are not eligible for RoSO under your deed of agreement you should contact the Department as soon as possible at BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au with

'BMP Scheme – [Name] – Request for Deferral/Simultaneous Work Approval' as the subject.

As advised in the Department's May 2021 Update, deferrals and simultaneous work approvals can be provided retrospectively for BMP participants.

We will process these requests as soon as possible, noting that the Department is currently prioritising requests from MRBS Scheme participants.

I have contacted the Department seeking a deferral/simultaneous work approval. When will the Department respond?

If you are considering a change to your work activities you should take measures to ensure that any change you make won't breach your current agreement.

- If you are an MRBS Scheme participant wanting to change work activities which are not eligible for RoSO under your contract, you must obtain approval for deferral of RoSO or a simultaneous work approval before commencing work in the ineligible area. It is important that you send an email to the Department as soon as possible.
- If you are a BMP scheme participant your deferral and simultaneous work approval can be provided retrospectively. However, in accordance with the requirements of the BMP Scheme Deed of Agreement or Variation, we encourage participants to email the Department as soon as possible.

When emailing your enquiry to BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au please use the following naming convention to help us quickly categorise and address your requests.

Subject line: '[Scheme/Program] - [Your name] – [Request type]'

BMP and MRBS Felloved participants needing to work in an ineligible location and who require an unrestricted Medicare Provider Number to remain open, or to request a new one, will need to submit an Application for a Medicare Provider Number form (HW019 Form) to Services Australia.

The timeframes for processing such requests are set by Services Australia and not the Department. We recommend that participants in this situation submit their application to Services Australia as soon as possible.

[I am a doctor that was not bonded correctly, do I continue working where I am now?](#)

Doctors who were not correctly bonded under the Program should continue to work as they are now, without being concerned about the consequences of breaching their contract or deed of agreement.

The Department of Health is putting in place steps to manage your situation as a priority. Under the legislation, certain steps are required to ensure participants are correctly bonded under the Program. Due to issues with the opt in process, most participants of the MRBS Scheme and BMP Scheme that sought to opt in, have not been correctly bonded under the Program. This includes participants that thought they had completed their obligations and exited the Program.

The effect of this is that participants remain in their MRBS or BMP Scheme and are bound by their contract or deed of agreement respectively. This may mean that participants have completed work which is eligible under the Program but not under their MRBS or BMP Scheme.

It may also mean participants have breached the conditions of their contract or deed of agreement. We understand that this may cause you concern. The Department will work with each affected individual to fully understand their personal circumstances from 2020 till now. This will ensure that any unintended consequences or breaches are managed on a no disadvantage basis.

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

Each individual's case is allocated to a case manager for review. All cases are handled on an individual basis with individual circumstances, legacy scheme requirements and individual contracts or deeds of agreement needing to be reviewed.

If, in changing their work activities, an affected individual has breached their legacy scheme agreement, the Department will seek to manage that breach, including removal of any possible Medicare ban and waiver of any associated financial liability.

[What happens if I am in breach?](#)

Under the legislation, certain steps are required to ensure that participants are correctly bonded under the Program. Due to issues with the opt in process, most participants of the MRBS Scheme and BMP Scheme that sought to opt in, have not been correctly bonded under the Program.

MRBS or BMP Scheme participants who were not bonded correctly may have completed work which is eligible work for the purposes of the RoSO under the Program but not under their MRBS or BMP Scheme. You may be in breach of your contract or agreement because you were not correctly bonded under the Program. This includes participants that thought they had completed their obligations and exited the Program.

The Department understands these issues may cause you concern. The Department is working with participants that were not correctly bonded under the Program to understand their personal

circumstances and to work closely with them to ensure any unintended consequences or breaches are managed. We will take a no disadvantage approach.

If, in changing their work activities, a participant has breached their legacy scheme agreement, the Department will seek to manage that breach, including removal of any possible Medicare ban and waiver of any associated financial liability. Each case will be individually managed and you may be asked to provide the Department with more information. This request will be sent by email and will allow individual management of your case.

How long will it take to resolve?

The Department is doing everything possible to resolve any issues for affected individuals as quickly as possible. Fundamental to this approach is that there will be no disadvantage for individuals who were not bonded correctly under the Program.

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.

While the Department will work through each case as quickly as possible, at key points in the process, the Department may require additional information from the individual or require the individual to confirm their interest to opt in to the Program.

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

I am in the MRBS scheme and need to change my work activity. I am concerned that I might be in breach.

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.

MRBS Scheme participants seeking a change to their 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.

The Department cannot approve retrospective deferrals for MRBS Scheme participants.

Participants who have obtained Fellowship can be granted simultaneous work approval to enable them to work in ineligible areas whilst also meeting their RoSO requirements.

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.

I haven't heard from the Department of Health, why is there such a delay in responding?

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

The Department acknowledges the extensive delays in responding to enquiries and emails. We continue to work through the hundreds of emails we receive each week. It will take time for the Department to work through all of the requests.

If you have a general enquiry about the Bonded Medical Program, information is available on the Department of Health website:

<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/reformed-bonded-programs>

What is the best way to contact the Department?

If your enquiry is of a general nature, please check the Department's website. We are posting regular updates on the Program's implementation [Department of Health | Bonded Medical Program Resources](#).

If you have not found the answer to your enquiry, the Department's call centre is available for general inquiries:

1800 987 104 (Mon–Fri 8:30am – 5:00pm AEST).

If your question relates to your personal circumstances, please contact the Bonded Medical Program Team at BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au

When emailing your enquiry please use the following naming convention to help us quickly categorise and address your requests.

Subject line: *'(Scheme/Program): (Your name) : (Request type)'*

For more information, visit the Department's [website](#) .

I have decided to withdraw from the Program and therefore breach. What is the penalty for withdrawing?

If you withdraw from your course of study in medicine after the census date for the second year of study, you will be liable to pay the Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP)-related cost of the course of study in medicine for the years or part year (semester) of study undertaken, plus interest.

If you have completed your study but have not completed your RoSO within the 18 year timeframe (or an extended period), you will be liable to pay 100% of the CSP-related cost of your course of study in medicine, less a pro-rata amount based on any proportion of RoSO completed, plus interest.

This amount will be recoverable as a debt due to the Commonwealth.

The repayment amounts for each year of the medical course are available on the Department of Education and Training website at www.education.gov.au/funding-clusters-and-indexed-rates (refer to the Commonwealth contribution amount for the funding cluster that includes medicine).