



Bonded Medical Program

Program Update – December 2021

Overview

The Issues

Our priority groups

How we are progressing

The opt in process

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Q & A

Information on the Bonded Medical
Program



Early implementation issues - timeline

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 and Program materials were corrected.

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

Early implementation issues – Opt in

Under the legislation, specific administrative steps are required for an individual to become a 'bonded participant' under the Program.

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

Who were the affected individuals?

There are 3 groups we are progressing, prioritised in date order that the individual sought to opt in

On 16 March 2021, the department wrote to over 2,000 affected individuals to advise of the issues.

In agreement with stakeholders – including the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Medical Students' Association – the department has prioritised affected individuals as follows:

1. Individuals who thought they were bonded, had completed their obligations and had exited the Program;
2. Individuals who thought they were bonded and still need to complete their RoSO; and
3. Individuals who had expressed their interest to opt in and await a response.

The department is working hard to resolve each case.

Opportunities to simultaneously progress other cases

We have a further 3
sub-groups we can also
progress

While we continue to resolve the priority group cases listed on the earlier slide, the department has identified opportunities to simultaneously progress some cases in addition to resolving the priority groups. Initially, these new sub-groups include:

- participants without any breaches who have completed 3 years RoSO and have satisfied the requirements of the Program;
- individuals seeking deferrals under their legacy scheme agreement while also waiting to opt in;
- final year medical students seeking to commence RoSO in an initial work placement.

What is the process the department must go through to correctly bond a participant

*Advise the department of your intention to opt in by emailing
BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au
using the subject convention:
(Scheme/Program): (Name): (Request type)*

The process to resolve cases involves understanding the affected individual's personal circumstances since they were not correctly bonded in 2020. This includes a thorough assessment of both recent and historic actions taken.

As the department works through the cases in the date order that participants sought to opt in, you will be assigned a case manager.

The department will review your record to check all current obligations are up to date and that you are eligible to opt in. This may require you to provide additional information to confirm your RoSO.

A requirement for eligibility to opt in is that the individual must not be in breach of their legacy scheme agreement.

Thereafter, you will need to advise the department in writing that you wish to opt in to the Program and that you agree to participate in the Program using the Bonded Return of Service System (BRoSS).

The Secretary needs to agree to your participation in the Program.

You become a **bonded participant** in the Program the day after the Secretary agrees to your participation and notifies you in writing.

What if there is a breach?

It is important to be aware that there are a number of complexities in progressing the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme cases.

A requirement for eligibility to opt in to the Program is that the individual must not be in breach of their legacy scheme agreement.

If, in changing your work activities since 2020, you have breached your legacy scheme agreement, we will work with you – applying the ‘no disadvantage’ approach – to manage that breach, including removal of the related Medicare ban and waiver of any financial liability.

In accordance with the legislation, the Breach must be managed before the individual can advise the department in writing that they wish to opt in to the Program.

Avoid a breach - seek a deferral

We encourage participants to email the department as soon as possible at:

BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au
with *[Scheme] – [Name] – Request for*
Deferral/Simultaneous Work Approval' as
the subject.

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

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 seek a simultaneous work approval before commencing work in the ineligible area.

Under the legislation, the department cannot approve retrospective approvals for MRBS Scheme participants.

The department appreciates that BMP Scheme participants may also wish to make a change to their work activities which are not eligible for RoSO under their deed of agreement.

BMP Scheme participants, deferrals and simultaneous work approvals can be provided retrospectively but we encourage participants to email the department as soon as possible.

How can I prepare?

While we can access RoSO completed through Medicare claims, if you have completed other eligible work, we will need information from you to confirm your RoSO

To prepare for your case to be managed, we ask that you approach your employer seeking one, or a combination, of the following as evidence of eligible work completed:

- Contract of employment – verifying the dates, hours and location(s) of work completed;
- Letter of Offer – verifying the dates, hours and location(s) of work completed;
- Statement of service – verifying dates, hours and location(s) of work completed; and/o
- A signed and witnessed statutory declaration – outlining the dates, hours and location(s) of work completed.

NB: If you are self-employed, you also have the authority to sign evidentiary RoSO documentation verifying the dates, hours and location(s) of work completed.

How many cases are resolved

	Cases	Confirm wish to opt-in based on Dept. 16.03.21 correspondence	Allocated	Finalised	% cases of which confirmed - completed
OPT -In EXIT - not correctly bonded	176	N/A	175	158	90.3%*
OPT -In STAY - not correctly bonded	540	408	477	172	42.2%
WAITING TO OPT-In	1382	825	171	43	5.2%

*refers to per cent completed of allocated

What more is the department doing to resolve all cases?

The department has been working through these cases ensuring the processes are legally correct.

We will continue to be accountable to affected individuals as we work to resolve all cases.

There are a number of complexities in progressing individual cases, particularly for MRBS cases. We have developed and refined our processes to ensure they are legally correct.

The department has established a “Surge Taskforce” focussed on resolving Bonded Medical Program cases.

Having established legally correct processes, we can now focus on administrative efficiency. We are now able to commit to targets to finalise the cases for affected individuals.

We will shortly be increasing the resourcing of the taskforce.

Amendments to the *Health Insurance Act 1973* – that received the Royal Assent on 13 December 2021 – will provide additional flexibility to administer the Program. This is significant as the amendments will allow for some inadvertent and/or minor breaches to be more appropriately managed. *We will provide further information on the amendments shortly.*

The department is committed to communicate both the targets and our progress towards meeting those targets through regular newsletters – *Commencing early 2022.*

Bonded Return of Service System (BRoSS) - RWAs

BRoSS is the 'web portal' which allows you to plan, monitor and manage your obligations under the Program.

In November 2021, access was extended to Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs) to assist them to support bonded participants under the Program.

RWAs can now access information about bonded participants in their area.

Your RWA can assist you to access rural medical placements and professional development opportunities during undergraduate and early career years.

Improved email response times

The department acknowledges the delays previously experienced by affected individuals.

Since the move to a single mailbox for all enquiries BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au in July 2021, we have progressively improved our enquiry response times.

For most enquiries, we are now providing a response within 4 weeks (or sooner). If you have emailed us since mid-November 2021 and have not received a response, please email us again and we will follow up with you.

If you have emailed us within the last 4 weeks, please do not email again as this will slow down our response times.

Please continue to use the following subject line:
[Scheme/Program] – [Name] – [Request type]’.

More information to help you decide if you want to opt in

Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) Scheme participants that have completed their course of study in medicine are able to opt in.

Bonded Medical Places Scheme participants can choose to opt in to the Program at any time.

The decision to express an interest to opt in will depend on your assessment of the benefits the new Program offers you when compared to your existing legacy scheme agreement.

When considering whether to opt in to the Program, the fact sheets – linked on the Bonded Medical Program 'Resources' webpage – set out important considerations for legacy scheme participants. Each fact sheet provides a useful comparison table between that legacy scheme and the Program.

Participants are encouraged to seek independent advice prior to making a decision to opt in.

Where to go for further information

WEBINARS

- Further Program information webinars are available on the department's website (see below)

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 personal arrangements
- BondedMedicalProgram@health.gov.au
Subject: (Scheme/Program): (Name):
(Request type)



Questions and Answers



How many cases has the department resolved?

The department has now resolved 158 cases of those individuals who thought they were bonded, had completed their obligations and had exited the Program.

We have resolved 172 cases where the affected individual thought they were bonded and still needs to complete their RoSO

We have resolved 43 cases of individuals waiting to opt in.

Questions and Answers



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

As discussed during the webinar, it is important to be aware that there are a number of complexities in progressing individual cases.

Now that we have developed legally correct processes we are able to focus on administrative efficiencies and commit to targets for finalising cases.

The department is committed to being accountable and transparent and will communicate both the targets and our progress towards meeting those targets through our regular newsletters - commencing early 2022.

We understand the frustration this is causing for participants and we ask for your patience as we work through each case.

Questions and Answers



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 not eligible under my legacy scheme.

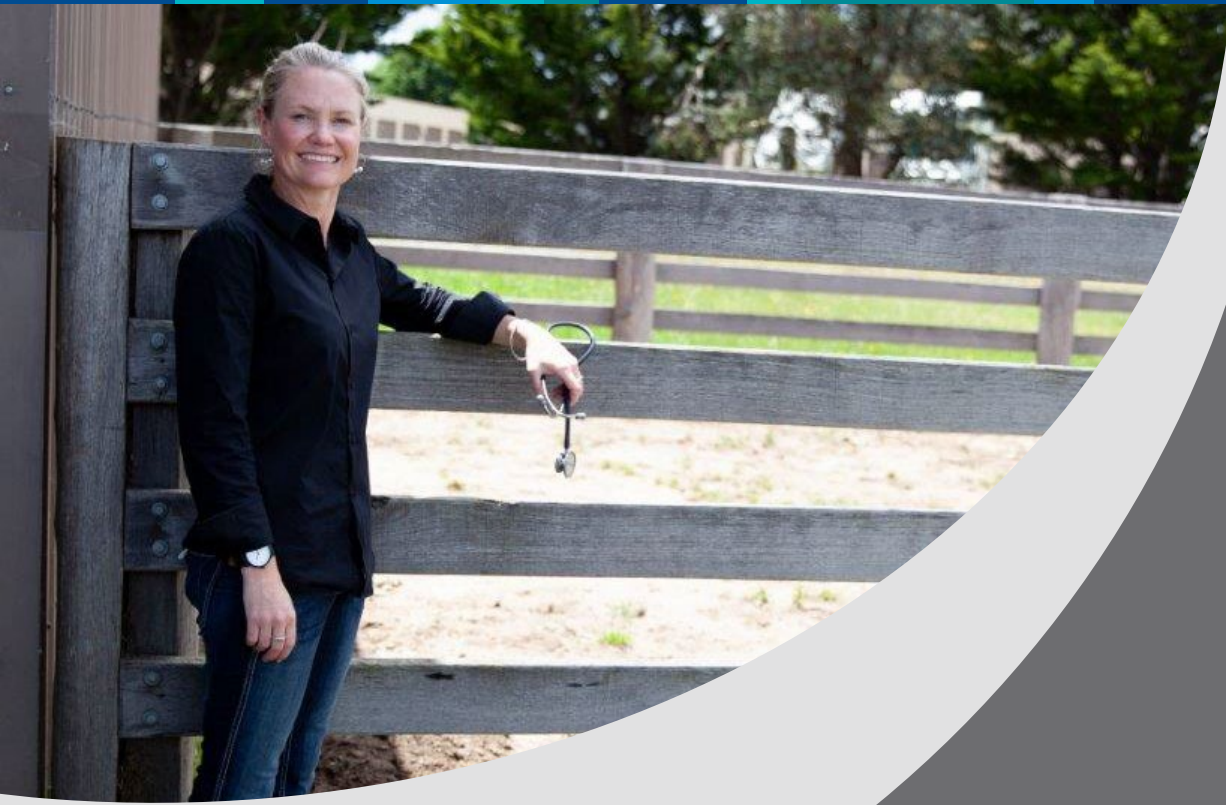
Will my RoSO count?

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

The department will work with you to fully understand your personal circumstances from 2020 to now.

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

Questions and Answers



What is the ‘no disadvantage’ approach?

The department recognises that, since implementation commenced, individuals that sought to opt in to the Program – including those that were not correctly bonded during 2020 – have changed their work activities assuming they were, or would be, correctly bonded by now.

The department will apply a ‘no disadvantage’ approach to those participants who completed eligible work (i.e. work completed that is compliant with the requirements of the Program), in good faith by counting this work towards the RoSO under the Program.

The ‘no disadvantage’ approach includes managing any breaches that may have occurred since the start of 2020 in relation to the implementation issues. This also includes removing any related Medicare ban and the waiver of any financial liability associated with those breaches.

Questions and Answers



Once I am allocated my case manager, how long will it take to opt me in?

Each case is different and therefore it is not possible to provide a timeframe to resolve your individual case.

The process to opt in is voluntary. You are free to consider your options at each step.

Once your case manager is allocated, they will work with you to consider your personal circumstances, including actions taken since you sought to opt in.

There will be a review of your RoSO and you may be asked to provide further evidence of RoSO.

If a breach is found, this will need to be managed before you advise the department in writing that you wish to opt in.

The process takes time and we appreciate your patience as we carefully work through your case.

Questions and Answers



I asked to opt in to the Program 18 months ago. I have now almost completed my RoSO, is it worth me opting in to the Program from my legacy scheme?

This will depend on what phase or stage you are at under your existing arrangement.

Check your agreement/contract to see what your current arrangement is and whether there is benefit in opting in to the Program.

Participants are encouraged to seek independent advice prior to making a decision to opt in.

Questions and Answers



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

We acknowledge that participants are waiting to hear from a case manager.

The department is working through cases in the date order that the individual sought to opt in.

A case manager will be in touch when your case is allocated and will work with you to consider your personal circumstances, including actions you have taken since seeking to opt in.

We appreciate your patience as we carefully work through the complexities of each case.

Questions and Answers



What are the benefits of opting in to the Program from my legacy scheme?

The Program provides a number of advantages to participants compared with the legacy schemes including:

- a standard three year RoSO (rather than up to six years under some of the legacy schemes);
- replacement of the individual contract or deed of agreement with statutory provisions
- streamlined reporting using the online system (BRoSS);
- more flexibility in completing RoSO.

The decision to opt in will depend on your assessment of the benefits of the Program compared to your existing legacy scheme agreement.

Questions and Answers



THANK YOU