

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12- 166

OUTCOME 12: Health Workforce Capacity

Topic: DISTRICT OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGE OPERATIONS & EXEMPTIONS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

- a) Can the Department advise how many s19AB exemptions have been granted in the last 3 years?
- b) What reasons were used to grant exemptions?
- c) Were all reasons those found in the s19AB Guidelines at the relevant time? Provide explanations for any that were not.
- d) What was the breakdown of the number of exemptions by either ASGC-RA or RRMA?

Answer:

- a) The number of exemptions under section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* (the Act) that have been granted to overseas trained doctors (OTDs) or foreign graduates of an accredited medical school (FGAMS) are available according to the financial year, commencing within the 2009-10 Financial Year is as follows

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12 year to date
Total Section 19AB exemptions granted	4,467	7,594	4,178

A section 19AB exemption is granted to allow a particular OTD or FGAMS to access the Medicare benefits arrangements at a specific location. It should be noted that section 19AB of the Act does not restrict an OTD or FGAMS to practising at a single location. Therefore, OTDs and FGAMS may hold multiple section 19AB exemptions to access the Medicare benefits at a number of locations.

- b) Section 19AB exemptions are granted according to the provisions set out within the Section 19AB Guidelines. Clause 4.1.1 of the Section 19AB Guidelines states that in most cases the primary consideration for a decision maker on the granting of exemptions under section 19AB, except class exemptions, is that applicants must work in districts of workforce shortage.

Other circumstances that are considered by the Department of Health and Ageing include evidence that the applicant medical practitioner is:

- working towards obtaining a Fellowship qualification on an approved workforce or training program;
- seeking to provide locum services in cases where there is an established need for a locum doctor at a medical practice;
- seeking to provide assisting medical services at a location under the supervision of a specialist medical practitioner; or
- seeking to practise privately during the after-hours period at a nominated practice location.

- c) Each section 19AB exemption application is assessed against the primary consideration contained within the Section 19AB Guidelines. Exemption applications are also considered against class exemptions and/or delegate's discretion provisions within the Guidelines in cases where the applicant is working towards a Fellowship qualification, seeking to provide locum services, providing assisting services or practising during the after-hours period. These types of application either seek to address an identified workforce shortage or improve the skills of the applicant medical practitioner so that they may undertake future work in District of Workforce Shortage areas.
- d) The breakdown of the number of section 19AB exemptions that are held by OTDs and FGAMS by area classification under the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) is as follows:

Table: Current section 19AB exemptions as at 31 January 2012 (last available figures)

Remoteness Area (RA)	Total section 19AB exemptions granted	GPs (including exemptions for workforce and training program placements)	Specialists (including assisting exemptions)
Major cities of Australia (RA-1)	4,575	2,572	2,023
Inner Regional Australia (RA-2)	2,999	1,893	1,111
Outer Regional Australia (RA-3)	1,649	1,050	606
Remote Australia (RA-4)	509	322	191
Very Remote Australia (RA-5)	315	214	103

It should be noted that section 19AB of the Act does not restrict an OTD or FGAMS to practising at a single location. Therefore, OTDs and FGAMS may hold multiple section 19AB exemptions for medical practices located within areas that have different classifications under the ASGC-RA.