

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016, 1 - 2 June 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000397

OUTCOME: 8 - Health Workforce Capacity

Topic: Health Workforce Scholarships

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon, Nick

Question:

I note that the Budget Papers include a saving of \$72.5 million over four years by consolidating the existing health workforce scholarships into one program.

- a) How many scholarship places will be cut because of this change?
- b) What has been the take-up rate for the scholarships so far?
- c) What was the basis for this decision?
- d) What other incentives are there to encourage medical practitioners into rural and regional areas?
- e) What are the current statistics on the shortage of health professionals in regional areas? How will cutting this program help to improve these statistics?
- f) How many positions will exist in the new program? What is the value of these positions – how much funding do they provide?
- g) The Budget Papers also state that the savings from this measure will be directed to other health programs or to the MRFF. Which is it, and what programs will the savings go to?

Answer:

- a) The number of scholarships under the new programme has not yet been determined.
- b) There are variations across the different scholarship programmes and across scholarship types, but in general, most scholarships offered under the current programmes have been taken up.
- c) The new programme will reduce administration costs, and allow a more flexible allocation of scholarships informed by workforce supply and demand information.
- d) There are many Commonwealth initiatives to encourage doctors to work in rural and regional areas, including:

- The Rural Clinical Training and Support programme, which aims to encourage doctors to take up rural practice by providing clinical training opportunities in rural areas while they are completing their medical degree;
 - The National Rural Health Student Networks, which are funded to encourage students studying health courses to pursue rural health careers;
 - The John Flynn Placement Programme, which funds vacation placements for medical students in a rural community during their medical degree;
 - The Commonwealth Medical Internships programme, which gives funding priority to internship positions based on the amount of time an intern will spend in training rotations in regional, rural and remote areas;
 - The Australian General Practice Training programme, which allocates 50% of all funded training places to doctors training on the rural pathway towards GP fellowship qualifications;
 - The General Practice Rural Incentives Programme, which provides financial incentives to GPs and GP registrars working in rural and remote areas;
 - The Rural Locum Education Assistance Programme, which funds emergency medicine training for urban doctors who commit to providing locum services in rural areas; and
 - The Rural and Remote General Practice Programme, which funds a network of state-based Rural Workforce Agencies to provide recruitment and relocation support for doctors to work in rural practices.
- e) Workforce availability in regional areas varies by profession and by region. More information is available in the “Australia’s Future Health Workforce” reports published on the Department of Health’s website and the Allied Health Workforce 2013 Report published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The new scholarship scheme is expected to increase the availability of health workers in regional areas, as there will be a return of service obligation introduced for most scholarship recipients under the new scheme.
- f) The number and value of scholarships has not yet been determined – the new programme will not commence until 1 July 2016, following a competitive approach to market.
- g) Savings from efficiencies across the Health portfolio within the 2015-16 Budget are being reinvested in the Government’s health priorities. This includes the Medical Research Future Fund.