DIVERSITY IN THE MEDICAL MIX

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are a significant and important part of the health workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Sometimes called an Overseas Trained Doctor or OTD, an IMG is “a person whose primary medical qualification was not obtained at a medical school accredited by the Australian Medical Council and located in Australia or New Zealand or who, at the time of enrolment in their primary medical degree at an accredited medical school was not a permanent resident or citizen of Australia or New Zealand”.

Under this definition, a doctor remains an IMG regardless of how long they have been in Australia and whether they have subsequently become Australian citizens or achieved full specialist recognition. They may be hospital doctors, general practitioners or other medical specialists.

The definition of an IMG therefore encompasses:

- doctors who, for example, migrated to Australia in the waves of migration since the Second World War and are now Australian citizens or permanent residents
- doctors who are permanent residents who have migrated under various migration programs (eg family reunion, refugee, spouse migration programs)
- doctors who have recently migrated under 457 (Long Stay) business migration visas
- Temporary Resident doctors (422 Temporary visas) some of whom will leave after a short time and some who will become permanent residents and stay
- international medical students including those on 442 (Occupational Trainee visas).

IMGS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

IMGs comprise 38% of the GP workforce in major cities (compared with 25% 10 years ago). In regional, rural and remote areas, IMGs comprise 43% of the GP workforce (up from 33% 10 years ago). The growth in IMGs as a proportion of the workforce has therefore been higher in major cities.

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<tr>
<td>Australian Medical Graduates</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Medical Graduates</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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Source: Medicare Australia
CURRENT GP WORKFORCE BY REMOTENESS CLASSIFICATION

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<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner regional</th>
<th>Outer regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very remote</th>
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Source: Medicare Australia2

WORKFORCE FORECASTS

Australia has a goal of being self-sufficient in national health workforce supply3 however the Future Health Workforce Report (formerly Health Workforce 2025)4 forecasts Australia’s continued reliance on IMGs to meet workforce supply until at least 2025.

The report’s future workforce modelling suggests that for Australia’s medical workforce to be self-sufficient by 2025, the geographic distribution of our doctors would need to improve by 100% over 2012.

The Australian Government has substantially invested in the growth of the Australian workforce with record numbers of graduates from medical schools in recent years. Newly graduated doctors can spend up to 10 years undertaking further training in hospitals and their chosen medical specialty, so the growth in recent graduates will take some time to fully flow through to the GP workforce.

This means IMGs will remain an essential component of our health workforce for many years.

REFERENCES

4 Health Workforce Australia 2012: Health Workforce 2025 – Doctors, Nurses and Midwives – Volume 1, HWA: Adelaide