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Future rural doctors left out again as placement support expands

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) says today's expansion of the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) scheme is good news for thousands of health students but a blow to Australia's future rural medical workforce.

RDAA President Professor Sarah Chalmers said the Government had again failed to recognise the significant financial pressures facing medical students, particularly for those wanting to do a placement in rural or remote Australia.

"It is deeply disappointing that medical students have again been excluded from the CPP scheme," Professor Chalmers said.

"Rural and remote Australia is short of healthcare professionals across the board, so every additional discipline included in the scheme is welcome.



"But continuing to leave medical students out undermines efforts to address Australia's rural doctor shortage.

"We know students from rural backgrounds, and those who rural do placements throughout their training, are much more likely to return to practise in rural and remote communities. If we're serious about tackling the rural doctor shortage, we need policies that help those students complete their training, regardless of their financial circumstances."

Medical students must complete around 2,000 hours of mandatory clinical placement during their degree. This can require them to relocate for extended periods, meet significant accommodation and travel costs, and give up their paid work for weeks or months at a time.

"For many medical students, placement means paying rent in two locations, travelling long distances and losing the income they rely on," Professor Chalmers said.

"Employers cannot always hold a job open while a student is away on placement for weeks or months. That makes medical students more financially vulnerable and more reliant on family support, putting medicine increasingly out of reach for people from less advantaged backgrounds.

"For rural students, the burden is often even greater because many are already living away from home simply to attend university.

“The Government clearly recognises that placement costs are a barrier for health students. The same principle applies to medicine, which makes the continued exclusion of medical students both difficult to understand and deeply frustrating,” she said.

RDAA welcomed the extension of the scheme to additional health disciplines but again urged the Federal Government to include medical students before the CPP’s scheduled review.

“We don’t begrudge a single student receiving support. Every health profession deserves assistance during mandatory placements,” Professor Chalmers said.

“But why students completing some of the longest and most demanding placements, and who are critical to Australia’s future healthcare workforce, continue to be left out remains a mystery.

"If we want more doctors in rural Australia, we need to make it possible for rural students to become doctors in the first place. We also need to give more medical students the chance to undertake rural placements, where many discover the exceptional training, diverse clinical experience and rewarding careers that rural medicine has to offer."

“Supporting medical students through mandatory placements is not simply about helping students. It is an investment in Australia’s future rural medical workforce and, ultimately, better healthcare for rural communities.

“We again call on the Federal Government to extend the Commonwealth Prac Payment to medical students before the scheduled review and ensure all students undertaking mandatory clinical placements, particularly where it requires relocation, have access to equitable financial support.”

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[Photo of Prof Sarah Chalmers](#)

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