

Medical Board of Australia consultation on the funding of external doctors' health programs

Submission received from: **Anonymous**

Question 1: Is there a need for health programs?

Do you see any value in, or need for external health programs for medical students and/or doctors? Please explain your reasoning

External health programs for medical students and doctors are critical. The staff of such programs have special expertise in assessing and treating physically and/or mentally impaired doctors and medical students. This treatment is confidential and usually not widely available in the general community. In addition, such programs can provide an expert triage service, based on a database of medical practitioners who are known to have expertise in this area.

External health programs provide an important liaison service with AHPRA, particularly for doctors who suffer from substance abuse or dependence and whose registrations may be subject to conditions. In these situations, external health programs can provide important advocacy, counselling and support. External health programs act as a crucial emergency referral service when doctors, often through lack of insight, are unable to present to the appropriate health provider.

Question 2: Preferred model for external health programs

Of the existing models in Australia as described above, is there a model that you would prefer to see adopted nationally? Is there an alternative model that you would like to see adopted nationally?

I would prefer to see the VDHP model adopted nationally.

Question 3: The role of the Board in funding external health programs

Do you believe that it is the role of the Board to fund external health programs?

Yes. The Board should have the best interest of its doctors (as well as of the community) at heart and thus should fund a national program that caters for the often-specialised medical needs of doctors.

Question 4: Range of services provided by doctors' health programs

What services should be provided by doctors' health programs. In addition to the ones you have selected, what other services (if any) should be provided by doctors' health programs?

Telephone advice during office hours

Telephone advice available 24/7

Referral to expert practitioners for assessment and management

Develop and maintain a list of practitioners who are willing to treat colleagues

Education services for medical practitioners and medical students to raise awareness of health issues for the medical profession and to encourage practitioners and students to have a general practitioner

Programs to enhance the skills of medical practitioners who assess and manage the health of doctors

Case management and monitoring (including workplace monitoring) the progress of those who voluntarily enter into Case Management agreements (or similar) with the service

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

Assistance in finding support for re-entry to work and rehabilitation

Research on doctors' health issues

Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Question 5: Funding

How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to you, to fund doctors' health services?

>\$40

Question 6: Other comments

Do you have any other comments or feedback about external health programs?

I have had direct involvement with VDHP since 2011. During an often difficult period I have found all of its hardworking staff to be resourceful and supportive and to have treated me with respect and confidentiality. If it had not been for the intervention of VDHP I would have not received the timely medical care that I desperately needed and with the assistance of which I have experienced a significant and sustained improvement in my condition.

VDHP has helped me to liaise with AHPRA, a process that has often been difficult and to make sense of and adhere to the restrictions that have been imposed on my condition. I would support in the strongest possible terms the development of a national external health program along the lines of VDHP.