



NEW DOCTORS' HEALTH SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

Doctors and medical students in NSW, the ACT, South Australia, and the Northern Territory will have access to expanded doctors' health services from 1 May 2016, a major step in the roll out of an enhanced national health program for medical professionals and students.

As part of a \$2 million network of nationally-consistent doctors' health services, the Doctors Health Advisory Service (NSW) will provide services for doctors and medical students in NSW and the ACT, while Doctors' Health SA will provide services for doctors and medical students in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The other States are expected to join these arrangements in coming months.

In 2014, the Medical Board of Australia (MBA) announced a significant boost in resources to doctors' health, and committed to establishing an equitable national health program for doctors and medical students, funded within existing Board resources from registration fees paid by medical practitioners.

Extensive national consultation with doctors about health services made it clear that separation between regulators and health programs was essential for them to work.

As a result, the Board decided to partner with the AMA to deliver the new arrangements.

The AMA established a subsidiary company, Doctors' Health Services Pty Ltd (DrHS), to administer the health programs at arm's length from the MBA and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

The \$2 million (including GST) annual funding will increase by CPI each year.

MBA Chair, Dr Joanna Flynn AM, said today that the Board wants to make sure it provides the right level of resources for each service around Australia in the new model, and will closely monitor the national program as it becomes fully established and implemented over the coming year.

AMA Vice President, Dr Stephen Parnis, said that the AMA and DrHS have been working to roll out services in accordance with the timeframes set by the MBA.

An expression of interest (EOI) process was conducted last year, with all existing service providers submitting an EOI.

Chair of DrHS, Dr Janette Randall, said the Board of DrHS was delighted with the standard of EOIs received.

"Funding is now flowing for NSW, the ACT, SA and the NT, Dr Randall said.

"We are also now in the final stages of discussions with the remaining providers to put in place arrangements that will see a range of nationally-consistent services available in every State and Territory."

Doctors' health services include:

- confidential health-related triage, advice and referral services for registered medical practitioners and medical students;
- follow up services for medical practitioners and medical students who need it, including support and advocacy in returning to work;
- education, awareness-raising and advice about health issues for medical practitioners and medical students;
- a physical office from which to provide services, or an alternative service arrangement
- training to support doctors to treat other doctors; and
- facilitation of support groups for medical practitioners and students with significant health problems.

Dr Flynn said the Board was pleased that some of the larger doctors' health services had agreed to support the provision of services in smaller States and Territories, ensuring an effective use of funding.

“As contracts with DrHS are finalised in the transition to the new national health program, Board funding will continue for existing services,” Dr Flynn said.

“We look forward to DrHS finalising contracts with providers in each State and Territory as we move to full national implementation of this important program for our profession.”

Dr Parnis said that an Expert Advisory Committee established by DrHS has developed a clinical governance framework to support the provision of services.

“Providers will share relevant information and resources, which have been developed as part of a very collaborative approach to the provision of doctors' health services,” Dr Parnis said.

“The AMA has strongly advocated for improved access to doctors' health services across the country, and these new arrangements will deliver on that goal.

“The AMA is very pleased to be playing a central role in this project.

“The services will remain at arm's length from the Medical Board to ensure that doctors and medical students trust these services, and use them at an early stage in their illness.”

Doctors and medical students, like everybody else in the community, should have their own general practitioner, and manage their own health within the usual professional context of a doctor/patient relationship.

Background

Historically, many doctors' health services in the States and Territories have operated largely on the goodwill of committed individuals, and with minimal funding from regulators.

Victoria and South Australia are exceptions. Existing programs in these States provide an expanded range of services to doctors.

The former Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria set up the Victorian Doctors Health Program (VDHP), in partnership with the AMA.

Since 2010, the Medical Board of Australia has continued to fund the VDHP, through AHPRA.

Support for Doctors' Health SA transitioned from the former Medical Board of South Australia to the Medical Board of Australia.

The new national doctors' health program will make sure health services are accessible to all doctors equitably, no matter where they live.

The AMA *Position Statement on the Health and Wellbeing of Doctors and Medical Students* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/health-and-wellbeing-doctors-and-medical-students-2011>

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CONTACT:

AMA: John Flannery, 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761

AHPRA: (03) 8708 9200

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