

AMSA Policy on the 10 Year Medicare Provider Number Restriction for International Students

Background:

Section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act (1973)* requires that medical practitioners be subject to a moratorium that places restrictions on their practice and their access to Medicare benefits for 10 years from registration in Australia with a State or Territory medical board – or from when they first become permanent residents of Australia. This rule applies equally to Australian-trained international students and international medical graduates (IMG). The moratorium was created to ensure that both international students and IMGs were able to provide service in an area of workforce shortage, as per the Federal Government’s requirements. By placing the more than 2,500 international students currently training at Australian medical schools alongside IMGs this legislation over-simplifies the situation. International students are trained to the highest standards, the same as their domestic student counterparts, in AMC accredited courses.

The Australian health care system is currently reliant on IMGs and will remain so even with the increase in Australian Medical Graduate numbers. A majority of the international students who are eligible to continue their training and practice in Australia are deterred by the provider number legislation and the fact that it gives no recognition to their long history of training within the Australian health system and the not insignificant financial assistance they provide the entire undergraduate medical education sector.

In a time of overall workforce shortage, and future projections that show continued reliance on IMGs we should be looking to retain well trained medical graduates. The net benefit of this retention to the Australia health system will be more doctors, trained to Australia’s highest standards, who will assist in creating a sustainable medical workforce servicing all areas of the Australian population.

In opposing the current application of Section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act (1973)* as it refers to international students trained at Australian universities, AMSA believes that:

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- there should be appropriate recognition of the possible long-term workforce contribution international students trained at Australian universities could provide
- the application of the Section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act (1973)* to international students trained at Australian universities is a disincentive for these students to practice in Australia
- international students trained at Australian universities should be subject to a differential application of Section 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act (1973)* to encourage their retention in the Australian health care system
- the retention of international students trained at Australian universities will have positive long term benefits for Australia's health workforce.

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