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| Nursing and Midwifery Graduate Sign-on Bonus Guidelines 2024  |
| Sign-on Bonus of $5,000 for graduate nurses and midwives 2024**March 2024** **Table of Contents** |
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## Background

Victoria’s healthcare workforce faces long-standing pressures that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid increased demand for care, ongoing action is needed to address issues regarding the supply and distribution of the healthcare workforce.

The Victorian Government is implementing a range of initiatives to support Victoria’s healthcare workforce, including a Nursing and Midwifery Graduate Sign-on Bonus (Sign-on Bonus) of $5,000 for existing nursing and midwifery students who graduate between 2022 and 2024 and commence their careers with a Victorian public health service.

The Sign-on Bonus will help to ensure that those who are already enrolled and progressing through their study are encouraged to take up careers in Victoria’s public health system.

The Sign-on Bonus will assist health services to attract and retain graduate nurses and midwives, and contribute to building the strength, capability and resilience of Victoria’s nursing and midwifery workforces.

This initiative is in addition to the $270 million package to support university and specialist training for thousands of nurses and midwives.

## About the Sign-on Bonus

Nursing and midwifery students who graduate in 2022, 2023 and 2024, obtain employment as a graduate nurse or midwife within a Victorian public health service and commit to this employment for two years will be eligible for the Sign-on Bonus.

The Sign-on Bonus, valued at $5,000 will be paid in two instalments:

* the first payment of $2,500 will be paid following commencement of an eligible graduate program.
* the second payment of $2,500 will be paid after two years of continuous work within a Victorian public health service in an eligible nursing or midwifery role.

The Sign-on Bonus is funded through the Victorian Department of Health and is administered on behalf of the State of Victoria by the Department of Government Services (DGS) with the support of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR), to make payments directly to eligible nurses and midwives.

Health services nominate eligible graduate nurses and midwives but will not be responsible for directly paying the Sign-on Bonus to these individuals.

**How the Sign-on Bonus works**

There will be two rounds of Sign-on Bonus payments each year:

* Health services must nominate at least one representative from their health service to manage the Sign-on Bonus process. Representatives will be the liaison between the Department of Health, DGS and the health service. To nominate, change or remove a representative, or for any other nominee questions, contact DGS via email: nsb@grants.vic.gov.au.
* Twice yearly, health service representatives will be requested to provide contact details of graduate nurses and midwives who have **commenced** a graduate program and are eligible for the Sign-on Bonus. It will be at the discretion of the health service to determine whether graduate nurses and midwives are eligible for the Sign-on Bonus as set out against the eligibility criteria.
* An online portal, developed by DGS, allows health services to log in and upload contact details of eligible graduates. A template, available in the portal, must be downloaded, completed and re-uploaded into the portal.
* If a health service does not have any eligible graduates in any given nomination round, this must be recorded in the portal to avoid reminder communications in relation to nominating graduates.
* The first nomination period for the year will occur in April. The online portal will be open to receive nominations for approximately 3 weeks. A reminder email schedule will remind representatives to provide details.

Representatives will be contacted via email and requested to provide the details of:

* + graduates who have **commenced** their graduate program in the current year plus any late-year intakes who commenced in the preceding year after the most recent payment round
	+ graduates who missed nomination in the previous payment round
	+ graduates eligible for the second instalment of the Sign-on Bonus (completed after 2 years of employment).
* The second nomination period for the year will occur in September. The online portal will be open to receive nominations for approximately 3 weeks. A reminder email schedule will remind representatives to provide details.

Representatives will be contacted via email and requested to provide the details of:

* + graduates who have **commenced** their graduate program since the previous payment round, ie, mid-year intake graduates
	+ graduates who missed nomination in the previous round
	+ graduates eligible for the second instalment of the Sign-on Bonus (completed after 2 years of employment).
* After contact details have been received, DGS will email nominated graduates with a link to the Sign-on Bonus claim form and a grant agreement for them to complete. The nominated graduate will be required to verify their identity and provide the bank account details for the Sign-on Bonus to be paid into. Nominated graduates will have four weeks to submit their claim after receiving their invitational email. A reminder email schedule will remind graduates to submit their claim.
* Once a nominated graduate has submitted their claim for the Sign-on Bonus and entered into a grant agreement with the Victorian Government, the Sign-on Bonus will be paid directly into the nominated graduate’s bank account within four weeks of their claim submission. The provision of incorrect bank details means that payment may not be received, and the department will be under no obligation to make any repayment.
* Eligible recipients will have a second and final opportunity to submit a claim for the Sign-on Bonus should they fail to submit their claim at their first opportunity, for each of the instalments.
* From 2024, graduates will begin to complete their two-year commitment. Those who have reached their two-year anniversary will need to be confirmed by health services (see ‘Process for second payments’ section for further information).

DGS will not undertake a verification process to determine eligibility of a nominated graduate. It is assumed that health services will provide a comprehensive list of nominees who are eligible graduates.

The term graduate has been used throughout the guidelines to refer to individuals that have completed an entry-to-practice nursing and/or midwifery qualification and are employed by an eligible Victorian health service in a graduate program that is typically 12-18 months in duration.

The term employee refers to individuals who have completed their graduate program and have remained employed within the same health service or have gained employment at another eligible Victorian public health service.

## Health services that do not run a graduate program

Heath services that do not run a graduate program are still required to participate in the Sign-on Bonus program. Graduates who are eligible for the second payment may move into health services that do not provide a graduate program following completion of their graduate program year.

## Eligibility criteria

Health Services are required to identifyand nominateeacheligibleemployee who fulfil all the following criteria for payment of the Sign-on Bonus:

* a nurse or midwife currently registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia
* a graduate of an eligible Australian undergraduate (bachelor’s degree) nursing, midwifery or double degree, nursing/midwifery course or postgraduate midwifery course or postgraduate nursing course (entry-to-practice only) in 2022, 2023 or 2024.
	+ ‘graduate’ means having successfully completed all academic and clinical requirements of their course. It does not relate to the date of a graduation ceremony, completion certificate or issue of exam results.
* has obtained employment in an eligible nursing, mental health nursing or midwifery graduate program in a Victorian public health service
* has commenced the graduate program in the same calendar year as graduating or the calendar year immediately following graduating. Nurses and midwives who graduate in 2024 must commence employment in the graduate program no later than the 2025 mid-year graduate intakes.
* are an Australian or New Zealand citizen or an Australian permanent resident during either nomination period within the employee’s graduate year (see section ‘Permanent residents’ for further information).

**Ineligible employees**

Employees will **not be eligible** to receive the Sign-on Bonus if they:

* are a temporary resident (see ‘Permanent residents’ section for further information)
* are a New Zealand permanent or temporary resident
* graduate from their course in a year other than 2022, 2023 or 2024
* have previously received a department Sign-on Bonus under this *Nursing and Midwifery Graduate Sign-on Bonus* initiative.

**Eligible nursing and midwifery graduate programs**

Eligible graduate programs are those conducted by a public health service providing formal graduate programs for new nursing and midwifery graduates.

For full details of graduate program eligibility criteria visit the [Department of Health’s Training and Development Funding guidelines](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/education-and-training/training-and-development-funding) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/education-and-training/training-and-development-funding>

**Requirements to receive two payments**

To be eligible to receive the **first $2,500 payment** a nominated graduate must:

* meet the eligibility criteria detailed above, and not be ineligible due to one of the ineligibility reasons.

To be eligible to receive the **second $2,500 payment** a nominated employee must:

* have been eligible for and received the first payment
* complete two full years of continuous employment within an eligible health service from the commencement date of the graduate program

(See ‘casual employees’ section below for further information)

## Process for second payments

Graduates who received their first instalment of the Sign-on Bonus are eligible for the second instalment if they meet the eligibility criteria for second payments. The two-year commitment is considered completed upon the two-year anniversary of the commencement date of their graduate program. Second payments are paid in the next available payment round following the completion of their two-year commitment.

After a graduate receives their first payment instalment, their details remain in the online portal. If a graduate moves between health services, they are required to log into the graduate portal to update their employment details. Health services then receive an email to confirm this change. If a graduate does not update their details then the portal will show that they are still employed at their first/previous employer.

Health services will be able to download from the portal a list of their potential employees who may be eligible for the second payment based on data previously entered into the portal. Health services must review this list to confirm who on their list was employed at their health service on their two-year anniversary date, and thus, completing their two-year commitment.

Graduates who are confirmed to be employed at the health service can then be nominated for their second payment. This might include graduates who remained at the health service, or graduates who moved and were employed at another eligible health service when they reached their two-year commitment.

If there are employees who moved to a different health service who are likely eligible for the second payment but were not on the downloaded list, those employees must log into the graduate portal to update their employment details. Once updated, health services can confirm and nominate them for their second payment.

Those potentially eligible for their second payment will be contacted via email prior to the nomination period and advised to update their employment details (if applicable).

If the employee updates their details too late to be included in the forthcoming nomination round, they can be nominated for their second payment at the next nomination round.

Graduates who completed their two-year commitment but have since resigned

If a graduate was employed at the health service on their two-year anniversary but has since left the health service, they are still eligible to be nominated as they completed their two-year commitment. DGS will have a secondary contact for them so that their invitational email to claim their bonus can be sent to them.

**Ex employees**

Employees on the list who were not employed at the health service on their two-year anniversary must not be nominated. It is the responsibility of the employee to update their employment details in the portal. If they moved to another eligible health service, the current health service will need to confirm employment changes (initiated by the employee in the portal) and nominate them. If they left the public system prior to their two-year commitment, then they are ineligible for a second payment.

## Payment schedule – 2024

The $5,000 Sign-on Bonus is split into two payments of $2,500 each.

The first $2,500 instalment of the Sign-on Bonus will be paid to an eligible graduate after submission of a claim in the prescribed format. The nominated employee will receive the first payment in line with the process outlined in the section “How the Sign-on Bonus works”.

The second $2,500 instalment of the Sign-on Bonus will be paid to a nominated employee following submission of their claim after completing their two-year service commitment as detailed in the eligibility criteria (and subject to any deferral or interruption requirements being met).

## Payment timetable – First round 2024

Graduate nurses and midwives who have **commenced** their graduate program since the previous round in September 2023 or were inadvertently not nominated in the previous round should be included in this round.

Any graduates eligible for their second Sign-on Bonus instalment should also be included[[1]](#footnote-2).

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| **Date** | **Process** |
| 2 April 2024 – 19 April 2024 | Health services are required to log into the online portal, and using the template available within the portal, confirm details of graduates/employees eligible to receive either their first or second Sign-on Bonus instalment. |
| April 2024 | DGS receives contact details and sends each nominated employee the link to Sign-on Bonus claim form and grant agreement. |
| 22 April 2024 – 17 May 2024 | Nominated graduates/employees receive their invitational email to claim their bonus and submit their completed claim form and grant agreement. |
| May – June 2024 | Nominated graduates/employees who have submitted their claim form and entered into a grant agreement with the Victorian Government receive their Sign-on Bonus. |

**Payment timetable – Second round 2024**

Graduate nurses and midwives who have **commenced** their graduate program since the previous round in April 2024 or were inadvertently not nominated in the previous round should be included in this round.

Any employees eligible for their second Sign-on Bonus instalment should also be included.

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| **Date** | **Process** |
| 2 September 2024 – 20 September 2024 | Health services are required to log into the online portal, and using the template available within the portal, confirm details of graduates/employees eligible to receive either their first or second Sign-on Bonus instalment. |
| September 2024 | DGS receives contact details and emails each nominated graduate/employee the link to Sign-on Bonus claim form and grant agreement. |
| 23 September 2024 – 18 October 2024 | Nominated graduates/employees receive their invitational email to claim their bonus and submit their completed claim form and grant agreement. |
| October – November 2024 | Nominated graduates/employees who have submitted their claim form and entered into a grant agreement with the Victorian Government receive their first or second Sign-on Bonus. |

## Special circumstances

#### Changing employer

Where an eligible employee changes their employment arrangement to another employer during the two-year eligibility period, the nominated employee will remain eligible for the second $2,500 payment provided all of the following requirements are met:

* employees must update their details in the graduate portal which are then confirmed by the health service
* the nominated employee maintains two years of continuous employment within an eligible health service
* each employer is an eligible public health service as defined in the [Training and Development Funding guidelines](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/education-and-training/training-and-development-funding) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/education-and-training/training-and-development-funding>
* on each occasion of changing employer, the nominated employee is able to provide evidence from their previous employer(s) that the nominated employee was and remained eligible for the Sign-on Bonus payment and that they have maintained continuous employment.

(See ‘Employment gaps’ section below for further information)

If an employment history is not provided to the new employer, eligibility for the second payment cannot be verified. This may result in the nominated employee’s forfeiture of the second payment.

#### Deferral of graduate program commencement

There may be special circumstances where a nominated employee needs to defer commencement of their graduate program. Nominated employees who defer commencement may still be eligible to receive the Sign-on Bonus if their deferral was due to one or more of the following circumstances:

* illness (requiring long-term treatment, care or recovery)
* injury (requiring long-term treatment, care or recovery)
* pregnancy/parental leave
* other special circumstances (such as caring for a family member with ongoing needs)
* the deferral does not exceed a period of one year.

The health service will need to determine special circumstances in line with relevant organisational policies.

Due to limitations of the Sign-on Bonus program, graduates must have commenced in a graduate program by 31 December 2025 to be eligible to receive their first payment. Graduates who defer the commencement of the graduate year after this date will not be eligible for the Sign-on Bonus program.

#### Interruptions to two-year commitment

A nominated employee may remain eligible for the second Sign-on Bonus payment where special circumstances arise and interrupt their ability to continuously serve the two-year period of employment as committed. The health service will need to determine whether the nominated employee’s circumstances represent a valid reason to interrupt the two-year commitment with a break in employment.

An interruption to the nominated employee’s employment occurs when an extended period of unpaid leave (not exceeding one year) is taken with the intention of returning to the position on cessation of the circumstances giving rise to the interruption, and the nominated employee returns (within one year) to fulfill the two-year commitment.

Paid leave, WorkCover and both paid and unpaid parental leave are **not considered** to be an interruption to the commitment and will not affect the employee’s ability to claim the second payment.

For nominated employees on unpaid leave, it is a requirement to remain an employee of the health service for the duration of their unpaid leave to achieve two years of continuous work. A nominated employee who takes extended unpaid leave must return to paid work and complete the two years of employment before receiving the second Sign-on Bonus payment.

(See ‘casual employees’ section below for further information)

#### Employment gaps

Where, during the two-year commitment period, a break in the employment of not more than 28 days between eligible employers occurs for a nominated employee when moving from one health service and starting at the next, the nominated employee will remain eligible for the second payment. The current employer will need to determine whether, in the circumstances, there has been reasonable grounds for a break in the employment of greater than 28 days in the two-year employment commitment.

#### Casual employees

It is not expected that nurses and midwives in their graduate year will be employed on a casual basis.

For employees who transition into casual employment in their second year, they will remain eligible for the second instalment of the Sign-on Bonus if they meet the following criteria:

* maintain direct employment in an eligible health service until their two-year commitment has been reached (for example a casual contract, employed in the casual pool)
* work regularly in an eligible health service in line with organisational policies regarding casuals

#### Casual employees will need to demonstrate their commitment to their employer by maintaining regular work throughout the duration of their casual employment. It is understood that casual employment can be inconsistent and there may be variation between weeks.

Casual employees are permitted to take periods of ‘leave’ for personal/recreational reasons.

**Agency employees are not eligible for the Sign-on bonus.**

**Permanent residents**

To be eligible for the Sign-on Bonus, graduates must be a permanent resident by the end of the second nomination round during their graduate year.

For example:

* If a temporary resident starts their graduate program in January and achieves permanent residency in March (same year), they are eligible for nomination in the April nomination round.
* If a temporary resident starts their graduate program in February and receives their permanent residency in May after the first nomination period has closed, they will be eligible to be nominated in the next/second nomination round in their graduate year.
* If a temporary resident starts their graduate program in February and receives their permanent residency in the following November after the second available nomination round during their graduate year then they are not eligible to receive the Sign-on Bonus.

#### Multiple concurrent employers

Nominated employees eligible for the second instalment of the Sign-on Bonus can only claim the Sign-on Bonus via one employer. Sign-on Bonuses are not available per employer. Where an error has occurred and multiple Sign-on Bonuses have been paid to an individual, the nominated employee will be required to refund any additional payments to the State.

## Pro-rata payments

Following changes to the FTE eligibility requirements to undertake a graduate program, pro rata payments will not be implemented. **All eligible employees will receive the full Sign-on Bonus regardless of their FTE**.

## Program management obligations

## Eligibility obligations

Health services must:

* identify eligible graduates/employees and share these details with DGS
* for the second payment, confirm continued employee eligibility and share these details with DGS
* manage eligibility processes for special circumstances through checking of evidence, as required, in a timely manner and on the appropriate forms.

## Tax and superannuation

Instalments of the $5,000 Sign-on Bonus may be subject to tax or have an impact on any other benefits obtained by the nominated employee in the relevant period. Individuals are strongly encouraged to seek professional financial advice regarding any tax or benefit eligibility implications of the Sign-on Bonus.

Superannuation is not required to be paid on the Sign-on Bonus payments.

## Record management

Health services will be required to maintain records of employees who are eligible for the second instalment of the Sign-on Bonus. Accurate records will enable health services to report the contact details to DGS of those eligible to receive the second Sign-on Bonus instalment.

**Nurses and midwives who remain at their health service**

For employees who continue working at the same health service after they complete their graduate year, recording their details should be straightforward.

**Nurses and midwives who change health services**

Employees who move between health services must update their details in the online portal. Health services Sign-on Bonus representatives then receive an email requesting confirmation of the employment change.

Recipients of the first payment will receive an email reminding them to update their employment details should they change.

New employees who received the first payment will need to advise their new health service employer of their eligibility to receive the second instalment of their Sign-on Bonus. They will also need to provide evidence to their new health service employer that they will be eligible to receive the second payment and the date on which they will become eligible for the second instalment.

## Health services privacy obligations

The information a health service provides for this program, including personal information, will be collected and used by the Victorian Government.

Health services must ensure nominated employees are aware of and consent to the sharing of their personal information with DGS for the purposes of administering the Sign-on Bonus.

## Health service Sign-on Bonus representatives

Nominated representatives will have their details provided by their organisation to DGS who are administering this program on behalf of the Department of Health.

Once nominee details are received, DGS will send an account activation email to access the Health Service Provider Portal developed for this program. Representatives will need to upload the data of eligible graduates as assessed by organisations into this portal.

Please note that nominees will need to activate their account regardless of whether the organisation has graduates, or a graduate program. Activating the account is necessary as it will enable organisations to participate in future rounds and support the payment of the second instalment to any eligible graduates who later join your organisation.

Health services will need to nominate representatives to liaise with the Department of Health and DGS regarding the Sign-on Bonus program. Once nominated nominees must:

1. Activate your account for your Health Service Provider Portal
2. Upload and submit data of eligible graduates during nomination periods
3. Monitor for communication regarding the Sign-on Bonus including requests to confirm changes of participants such as change of employer.

**Outgoing nominated representatives**

You will need to advise the Department of Health via nmw@health.vic.gov.au if you are no longer the ­nominated representative and provide another contact who will be the new representative.

## Victorian Government privacy statement

DJSIR is a program administrator and collects personal information in consultation with DGS for the purpose of administering claims and payments for the Nursing and Midwifery Sign-on Bonus.

The Victorian Government may collect demographic information for economic reporting purposes. No personal information is used in reporting; all reports are presented with aggregated data.

Any personal information about individuals claiming the Sign-on Bonus or a third party will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred and stored in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic) and other applicable laws.

For concerns regarding the privacy of personal information contact privacy@dgs.vic.gov.au. To view the Department’s privacy policy visit the [Department of Government Services privacy policy](http://www.vic.gov.au/privacy-policy-department-government-services) <www.vic.gov.au/privacy-policy-department-government-services>

## Contact

Any queries can be directed to: nmw@health.vic.gov.au

Technical issues with the online Sign-on Bonus portal or nomination process can be directed to DGS via their contact email: nsb@grants.vic.gov.au

To receive this document in another format, email <Nursing and Midwifery Policy Team> <nmw@health.vic.gov.au>.

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In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

1. From 2024, employees begin to be eligible for second payments. There will be some employees who completed their study in early 2022 and commenced a graduate program soon after who may have completed their two years of service in time for the 1st payment round for 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)