**Area of Need – Frequently Asked Questions**

1. **Do I need an Area of Need endorsement and why?**

Area of Need endorsements are required by the Medical Board of Australia for all General Practitioner or Specialist International Medical Graduates (IMGs) applying for **Limited** registration for Area of Need.

Under section 67(5) of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Victoria) Act 2009* the Medical Board of Australia requires the responsible Minister (or delegate) to decide whether an area of need exists and to provide written notice to the National Board.

IMG doctors on General Registration do not require an Area of Need endorsement.

1. **What are Distribution Priority Areas and Districts of Workforce Shortage and do I need one?**

A [Distribution Priority Area](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-workforce/health-workforce-classifications/distribution-priority-area) (DPA) is where the level of health services available to the local community does not meet a national service benchmark taking into account Medicare data, GP workforce, population demographics and socio-economic status. An area is automatically classified as a DPA when it is classified as MM 5 to 7 based on Monash Modified Model or the area is in the Northern Territory.

A [District of Workforce Shortage](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-workforce/health-workforce-classifications/district-of-workforce-shortage) is a geographic area in which the ratio of specialists to population is less than the national average or it has an Australia Statistical Geography Standard – Remoteness Area classification RA 3 to 5.

Further information on the DPA and the DWS can be obtained from the [DoctorConnect](http://www.doctorconnect.gov.au/) website.

The Department of Health (Commonwealth) is responsible for making DPA and DWS determinations.

Under [section 19AB](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-workforce/medicare-billing-restrictions/section-19ab) of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, an IMG must work in a DPA if a GP, or a DWS if a non-GP specialist, for at least 10 years. The 10-year period starts from the first day of medical registration. This is called the 10 Year Moratorium.

1. **How do I find a job in an Area of Need?**

In Victoria there is no specific list of Area of Need positions or zones. In most cases if a position is located within a Commonwealth designated DPA for GPs or DWS for non-GP specialists, it is likely that the Victorian government will also support this as an Area of Need.

In Victoria public hospitals are responsible for their own recruitment. A list of public hospitals is available on the Departments’ website at:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals/pubwebs.htm>

Alternatively specialist college websites often advertise vacant positions. A list of specialist medical colleges can be found on the Medical Board of Australia website or by clicking [here](https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Accreditation/Specialist-medical-colleges.aspx).

For General Practice you should contact the Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria (RWAV) on (03) 9349 7800 or visit the website at: [www.rwav.com.au](file:///C:\Users\mswa0108\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\IE\QC2UG3HF\www.rwav.com.au)

1. **How do I know if a job is in a DPA or DWS location?**

There is no consolidated list of DPA or DWS locations but you can check the DPA or DWS status of a location using the [Health Workforce Locator map](https://beta.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator).

For specialities that are not listed on the Health Workforce Locator map, please email the Commonwealth Department of Health at [19AB@health.gov.au](mailto:19AB@health.gov.au) to confirm if the particular location(s) are considered to be DWS for the specialty.

1. **What if the practice is not in a DPA or DWS, are there any exemptions?**

Yes. If a location is not currently considered to be in a DPA or DWS you may apply to the Commonwealth for consideration of a [19AB exemption](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-workforce/medicare-billing-restrictions/section-19ab) in one of the following categories:

* After hours work only
* Work on an approved workforce or training program
* Provision of services at Commonwealth funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care service
* Assistance at Operations exemption
* Academic exemption
* Specialties in acute shortage exemption
* Locum exemption
* Spousal exemption
* Replacement exemption

Detailed information regarding 19AB exemptions can be found in the [Health Insurance (Section 19AB Exemptions Guidelines) Determination 2019](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2019L00941). You should note that granting of 19AB exemptions is the decision of the Commonwealth government.

1. **In the absence of a DPA and DWS can you grant me an Area of Need?**

No. The position location must be in a valid DPA or DWS or you must be applying for a valid 19AB exemption in order to apply for an Area of Need endorsement.

1. **I am a General Practitioner holding permanent residency/Australian citizenship. Do I need a DPA too?**

Yes. All IMGs, regardless of residency status, are required to work in a DPA or DWS until they have fulfilled the 10-year moratorium.

1. **I am a General Practitioner holding permanent residency/Australian citizenship. Why can’t I work after-hours?**

Permanent residents/Australian citizens who were first registered after 1 November 1996 and who are neither vocationally recognised nor hold fellowship of a recognised medical college, are subject to [section 19AA](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-workforce/medicare-billing-restrictions/section-19aa) of the Health Insurance Act, 1973.

There are exemptions from section 19AA restrictions for certain training and workforce programs. Section 3GA of the Act allows medical practitioners who are otherwise restricted by section 19AA of the Act to provide professional medical services that are able to attract Medicare benefits.

1. **What evidence or documents need to be submitted with the Area of Need application?**

**New Applications**

1. **Evidence of Distribution Priority Area (DPA) status for GPs or District of Workforce** **(DWS) status for non-GP specialists**. As an Area of Need endorsement is not linked to Medicare provider numbers, there is no guarantee an IMG will be granted access to a Medicare provider number or the Medicare billing arrangements. Medicare provider numbers are linked to DPA/DWS status and therefore all applications must include evidence as follows:

* General Practitioners – a printout or scan of the [Health Workforce Locator map](https://beta.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator) positively identifying the location as a DPA.
* Specialists –a printout or scan of the [Health Workforce Locator map](https://beta.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator) positively identifying the locations as DWS or copy of the email from the Department of Health ([19AB@health.gov.au](mailto:19AB@health.gov.au)) confirming the location as a DWS for the specialty.

If a location is not currently a DPA/DWS you must indicate the type of 19AB exemption for which you are applying or provide evidence of a valid 19AB exemption held by the candidate.

1. **Statement of Need.** A brief employer statement thatdemonstrates genuine attempts to recruit to the position within the last 3 months.

**Renewal Applications**

1. Applications for an Area of Need endorsement renewal can be submitted with a copy of the IMGs current Medical registration. Evidence of DPA/DWS or 19AB exemptions are not required for renewal applications.
2. **Who can sign the Area of Need application?**

Ideally the application form should be submitted by the practice manager or health service employing the doctor. The form should be signed by a responsible employee validating the information provided is true and correct.