

June 2024

Recommendations to support IMGs in training

The AMA Queensland International Medical Graduate Working Group (IMG WG) was established to provide considered and expert advice and recommendations on IMG matters to better support this invaluable but often vulnerable group of doctors. Based on the results of an AMA Queensland survey of IMGs in September-October 2022, the IMG WG developed recommendations to support IMGs in training across 3 key themes:

- **orientation** issues (personal and professional);
- **workplace** issues; and
- **training** issues.

Orientation and workplace issues are amongst the main challenges faced by IMGs before and on arrival to Australia. That said, these issues are within the influence of Queensland Health as the largest employer of IMGs in Queensland and have been the focus of AMA Queensland advocacy with the Department and all Queensland Health Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) to date.

That said, the AMA Queensland Council has noted that whilst recommendations on these themes are applicable to IMGs generally, some have more direct relevance to hospital-based IMGs over their private practice counterparts. It is imperative that improved supports are provided for all IMGs regardless of practice setting, particularly those working in often-isolated private practice environments such as IMG GPs in regional and rural areas.

The third theme, **training** issues, encompasses a broader range of stakeholders across Australia including State and Federal government agencies, regulators, the various medical colleges, hospitals and private practice. Training issues can continue to negatively impact IMGs for long periods post-arrival and many IMGs experience inequitable access and difficulty navigating training application processes. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and inconsistent expectations for completion of training significantly impact retention of the IMG workforce and overall experience in Australia.

There has been significant work undertaken in this area with several reviews resulting in important recommendations for reform. Most notable is the December 2023 'Final report of the Independent Review of Overseas Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings' (the Kruk Review). In that regard, AMA Queensland supports the submissions made by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and those associated with the Interim Report.

Given IMGs comprise a significant proportion of our medical workforce, especially in regional, rural and remote areas, it is imperative that real improvements are made urgently. The health and wellbeing of our patients are inextricably linked to that of our doctors, including our IMGs. AMA Queensland presents the below recommendations for consideration and further progression at the State and Federal levels.

Orientation

AMA Queensland recommends improving IMG transition to Australia through transparency and consistent feedback of timelines, decisions and expectations in the following areas:

- the Australian health system (professional orientation);
- Australian culture/life and institutions (personal orientation);
- recruitment processes, information and support; and
- mentorship, including throughout the IMG recruitment process until 5-10 years post-migration.

It is recommended that Queensland Health (and other state health departments) develop materials, in collaboration with AMA Queensland (and other relevant AMA bodies), to assist IMGs to establish themselves and improve their transition to Australia through the following:

- a simply-designed, easy-to-navigate and open-access webpage with links to key pre-orientation and arrival information for personal matters including:
 - accommodation
 - financial and accounting services
 - primary and high school education
 - health care
 - transport
- free online and/or in-person seminars to enable group, peer-to-peer and senior-junior mentorship (similar to AMA Queensland's Private Practice Seminars)
- free lunch-time events for IMGs, similar to those provided in HHS' for doctors-in-training
- a variety of IMG-specific information (e.g. interviews, articles, fact sheets) through consultation with experienced and established IMGs, tailored by culture, country/region and medical specialty available online.

Workplace

AMA Queensland recommends implementation of strategies for improving IMG's understanding of employment conditions including fair pay, overtime, leave entitlements, grievance processes and the 10-year moratorium restrictions.

It is recommended that Queensland Health (and other state health departments) develop and provide, in collaboration with AMA Queensland (and other relevant AMA bodies), the following to assist IMGs migrating to Australia:

- information about how to obtain advice on employment contracts before execution during the recruitment phase;
- education regarding the most current Medical Officers' (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement; and
- a program to improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

The above recommendations are also consistent with the AMA Position Statement on 'Safe, healthy and supportive work environments for hospital doctors' (2023), particularly requirements for psychosocial safety and wellbeing set out in Part 18 'Discrimination, bullying and harassment' (available at <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/safe-healthy-and-supportive-work-environments-hospital-doctors-2023-position-statement>).

Training

AMA Queensland recommends the following measures are considered by relevant agencies to improve the IMG experiences related to access, processes and expectations of training programs:

- the provision of clear, comprehensive information to ensure IMGs are fully informed and have realistic expectations of accredited training requirements and career pathways, both during recruitment and upon arrival in Australia;
- the offering of an IMG Preparation/Readiness Program in every Queensland Health HHS (or other state public health service);
- timely and streamlined issuance of provider numbers for IMGs prior to or immediately upon arrival in Australia to reduce delays in commencement of employment and training;
- extra supports and funding to help IMGs working in key locations identified on the basis of need (e.g. in certain rural and remote areas);
- creation of a hospitalist/career medical officer position, similar to that provided in other jurisdictions; and
- implementation of the relevant Kruk Review and Interim Report recommendations as supported by the AMA IMG WG.

AMA Queensland remains committed to providing improved support for IMGs as vital contributors to our health system and medical workforce. The Queensland and Australian Governments and other relevant organisations are encouraged to consider implementing the above recommendations across each of the 3 identified themes.

Given the existing pressures on the medical workforce it is crucial to ensure these doctors have positive professional and personal experiences in Australia. The recruitment and retention of IMGs is a significant part of the National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021-2031 for the benefit of all patients, health professionals and the communities we serve.

AMA Queensland Council Recommendation: Private Practice IMGs

The AMA Queensland Council has noted that whilst the above recommendations have universal application, some have more direct relevance to hospital-based IMGs over their private practice counterparts. There is increasing concern and evidence that private practice IMGs are amongst the

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most isolated and vulnerable practitioners, with at least 50% of our regionally- and rurally located GPs identified as IMGs.

It is imperative that improved supports are provided for all IMGs regardless of practice setting, particularly those working in often-isolated private practice environments such as IMG GPs in regional and rural areas. It is, therefore, also recommended that government and other health organisations actively and urgently consider the specific support needs of private practice IMGs.