

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**AMA CAUTIOUSLY WELCOMES NEW VISA ARRANGEMENTS FOR OVERSEAS DOCTORS**

The AMA has cautiously welcomed the Government’s new visa arrangements, but is seeking more detail and clarification of the possible impact of the changes on medical workforce shortages.

The current 457 visas will be abolished from March 2018, and replaced by a new Temporary Skills Shortage Visa, which will have tighter conditions and have a smaller number of eligible occupations. It will also be harder to progress to permanent residency from the new visa class.

The AMA has been advised that doctors will still be eligible for the new visa, but there is little detail about medical specialties or groups. Existing 457 visa holders will continue on the same conditions they have now. It is important that doctors with these visas who have been working hard towards permanent residency are not disadvantaged.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said that international medical graduates (IMGs) have made a huge contribution to the Australian medical workforce, especially in rural areas and during periods of chronic workforce shortages.

“Many communities would not have doctors if it were not for the excellent work of IMGs,” Dr Gannon said.

“Australia is presently in the fortunate position of producing sufficient locally-trained medical graduates to meet current and predicted need. It is time to focus our energies on training the hundreds of Australian medical graduates seeking specialist training.

“But we still need to have the flexibility to ensure that under-supplied specialties and geographic locations can access suitably-qualified IMGs when locally trained ones cannot be recruited.

“It is important that we strike the right balance between filling vacancies with locally trained graduates and ensuring that communities, especially in rural and remote Australia, have doctors in the right numbers and with the appropriate specialist skills and experience to meet patient needs.

“The AMA welcomes the emphasis of the new arrangements to better target recruitment and the mandatory requirement for labour market testing, which the AMA has been calling for in light of the significant increases in locally-trained medical graduate numbers.

“We also need to see the Government step up policy efforts to encourage local graduates to work in the areas and the specialties where they are needed.”

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