

DISTRICT OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGE FACTSHEET

What is a District of Workforce Shortage?

A District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) is a geographical area of Australia in which the population's need for healthcare has not been met.

What is the purpose of a DWS?

DWSs are a key mechanism that the Australian Government uses to achieve an equitable distribution of medical services across Australia.

How is a DWS determined?

DWSs are determined by the Department of Health and Ageing using both Australian Bureau of Statistics population data and Medicare Australia's billing data.

In general, a location is deemed to be a DWS if it falls below the national average for the provision of medical services. Population needs for health care are deemed to be unmet if a district has less access to medical services than the national average.

Although the Department uses the doctor to population ratio in determining district of workforce shortage status, other information is available to assess whether a placement should be approved. Sophisticated mapping and other workforce statistics are used to determine the locations of medical practices, number of doctors and patient movements to and from practices. Other information that can be considered include local issues such as a high population of older patients and/or young families, whether the population is isolated in some way or whether the area provides medical services for surrounding districts that are in need.

Who is affected by a DWS?

DWSs are important for overseas trained doctors (OTDs) and bonded medical place scheme participants. OTDs apply to work in a DWS through Medicare Australia on the form used to apply for a Medicare provider number. All OTDs who first started working as a doctor in Australia after 1996 are subject to restrictions which affect where they can work in Australia. An approval is formally known as an "exemption under Section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act".

The application form is available online at the following website:

http://www.medicareaustralia.com.au/provider/business/files/ma_0266_app_for_initial_medicare_provider_number_general_practitioner.pdf

What is an Area of Need?

“Area of Need” is determined by the State and Territory Governments and methods of defining them vary. Generally, an Area of Need is any location in which there is a lack of doctors, including hospital based doctors, or where there are medical positions that remain unfilled even after recruitment efforts have taken place over a period of time.

In determining an Area of Need, the relevant State or Territory ensures that Australian qualified medical practitioners are not disadvantaged and that all attempts have been made to fill the position with Australian qualified doctors.

Who is affected by Area of Need?

It may be a condition of medical registration for OTDs seeking to practice in Australia that they work in an area of need. Many Areas of Need are also Districts of Workforce Shortage allowing OTDs to fulfil both the State and Federal requirements.

Further information:

Contact the Workforce Regulation Section of the Department of Health and Ageing by emailing DWS@health.gov.au to discuss your DWS enquiry.

Search for DWS locations:

If you would like to know whether you live or work in a DWS, you can check the locality by searching the online DWS database at the following website:

http://www9.health.gov.au/otdw/dws_database/cf/index.cfm