Health Workforce Scholarship Program

Guidelines

1 September 2022
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1. Introduction

The Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP) provides scholarships and bursaries to help health professionals in rural and remote Australia retain and enhance their skills, capacity and scope of practice.

The Program is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, administered in New South Wales by NSW Rural Doctors Network (RDN).

The HWSP is available to medical, nursing, midwifery, allied health, dental and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals providing primary health care in rural and remote NSW in private practice, a non-government or not-for-profit organisation within a Modified Monash Model (MMM) 3-7 location or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHS) in a MMM 1-7 location.

The objective of the HWSP is to improve access to the services needed in rural and remote areas by supporting an increase in skills, capacity and/or scope of practice of privately employed health professionals in order to target services to rural and remote areas where they are most needed.

The annual Health Workforce Needs Assessment (HWNA) informs the priorities and allocation of HWSP funds within NSW. This includes locations, professions and gaps in service access that may be addressed by enhancing the skills of the current health workforce.

Therefore, payments under the HWSP will be:

- Determined in response to identified local needs for health professionals who provide primary health services to rural and remote areas.
- Justifiable against the perceived workforce benefit of the training.

THE HEALTH WORKFORCE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE EITHER:

**SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENT**

A payment up to $10,000 per year for up to two years to support participants to undertake full or part-time studies (maximum of $20,000 in total over two years) to attain the qualification of either a postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, Master or PhD.

**BURSARY PAYMENT**

A payment up to $10,000 (maximum of $10,000 in total in one financial year) for participants to put toward the cost of upskilling, training or course fees and training-related expenses such as accommodation and travel, where appropriate.

Applicants can apply for multiple bursaries and scholarships for as long as the program continues, and the applicant remains eligible. Eligible applicants can apply for up to a total of $10,000 in a single financial year period.
2. Funding dates

RDN is contracted by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care to administer the HWSP to 30 June 2023.

Scholarship/bursary recipients with funding contracts that extend beyond 30 June 2023 are subject to ongoing funding for the program.

3. Eligibility

Who is eligible?
Use the checklist below to determine whether you meet the eligibility requirements for the HWSP. You are:

- a health professional who has obtained their primary professional qualification (minimum of a Bachelor’s degree unless otherwise noted below), holds professional registration (AHPRA or other relevant peak body) and is working in a role as:
  - an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner (minimum Certificate 4 in Primary Health Care); or
  - a dentist; or
  - a medical practitioner; or
  - a nurse or midwife (qualification minimum diploma level); or
  - an allied health professional.

As per the current HWNA, priority will be given to the following professions
- counsellor/psychotherapist
- physiotherapist
- psychologist
- social worker

Other eligible allied health professions providing services in priority study areas (see section 5)
- audiologist
- chiropractor
- dietitians
- exercise physiologist
- occupational therapist
- optometrist
- orthoptist
- orthotists/prosthetist
- osteopath
- pharmacist
- podiatrist
- speech pathologist

- providing primary health care services to patients on a full or part-time basis (minimum of 15 hours) in private practice or a non-government or not-for-profit organisation

- providing (or can demonstrate through a service or employment agreement that you are about to provide) primary health care services in rural NSW (MMM 3-7 locations) or an ACCHS in MMM 1-7 locations in NSW or ACT. Refer to the Health Workforce Locator to confirm your location’s eligibility.

- proposing to undertake study or upskilling activities that will fill the established, high priority gaps in primary healthcare service provision within your community, as identified in the HWNA

- proposing to continue working for an eligible employer in an eligible location after completing your course. Some applications will have a return of service obligation. See Section 8 for details.

Note: GP Locums providing services in a MMM 3-7 locations, or in an ACCHS in a MMM 1-7 location, may be eligible for up to $5,000 in bursary funding. Applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
Courses and activities do not need to be accredited but will be assessed by RDN for relevance, evidence base, value for money and the likelihood of meeting the identified learning and community needs based on the Health Workforce Needs Assessment.

**Who and what is not eligible?**

**Any health professional that is:**
- Employed solely through the NSW Government (e.g. employed in a public hospital, TAFE, university, LHD, PHN).
- On short-term employment or does not have regular contract hours.
- Solely working in a role providing management, leadership, teaching, supervising, or similar as this work is not considered providing primary health care to patients.
- Working on a model of care predominately or exclusively based on Telehealth.

**Scholarships or bursaries cannot be used for:**
- Retrospective costs: Costs for any activity already started or completed prior to an application being submitted. This includes online courses where access starts as soon as you pay. However, if you are partway through postgraduate study, partial funding may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Undergraduate (Bachelor) degree programs. Note: Certificate III and Certificate IV are not considered undergraduate degree programs and may be eligible for HWSP bursary funding.
- General supervision, mentoring, membership, or similar costs to maintain professional registration.
- Overseas face-to-face expenses.
- Courses provided by international institutions or course providers. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis where comparable upskilling is not available from an Australian provider.
- Study fully funded by other sources (e.g. your employer, other grants).
- Textbooks, equipment (including IT), membership fees, subscriptions or exam fees.
- Meal expenses and other incidentals.
- Taxi and Uber fares, hire cars, transfers, parking fees or similar.
- Activities for which other Commonwealth, State or Local Government bodies have primary responsibility.
- Upskilling where a course completion certificate or proof of attendance is not issued.

**4. What funding is available?**

The HWSP offers two types of funding scholarships and bursaries.

**Scholarship:** payment of course/subject fees towards the cost of completing a postgraduate course leading to a postgraduate qualification.

**Bursary:** payment to support the completion of a short course or to attend a conference. This funding may include reimbursement (full or partial) for the course cost and a contribution to travel related expenses.
You can submit multiple applications, up to the total value of $10,000 per financial year.

**Scholarship funding amount**

Scholarships of up to $10,000 per year can be provided for up to two years study (whichever runs out first) to attain a postgraduate qualification of either a postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, Master or PhD.

Scholarship values will be determined against the perceived workforce benefit of the training. Scholarships must be directly related to training and upskilling primary health professionals to provide clinical services to rural and remote areas or ACCHs.

Scholarship payments are made upon receipt of evidence of course/subject costs and confirmation of enrolment. A separate application is required for each study period (i.e. semester, trimester, term etc), with the value of the annual scholarship not exceeding $10,000.

**Bursary funding amount**

Bursaries are reimbursement payments of up to $10,000 which assist to cover the cost of training and/or course fees and/or cover or partially cover training-related expenses, where appropriate. Individual applications must be for a minimum total of $200.

Applicants may submit more than one bursary application up to the total value of $10,000 per financial year.

Bursaries must be directly related to training and upskilling health professionals who are providing or who are planning (with evidence) to provide face-to-face primary health services to rural and remote areas or ACCHs.

Bursary values will be determined against the training's perceived workforce and community benefit.

Bursaries can be used for activities such as:
- online or face-to-face short courses, workshops, conferences and seminars
- vocational Education and Training courses
- recognised industry skills training and upskilling for individual health professionals. Online overseas based courses are eligible only if there is not an Australian equivalent
- fellowship exam preparation courses – limited to funding for one preparation course for each exam (e.g one for AKT/KFP preparation and one for CCE preparation)
- provisional psychology supervision costs. Applicants must be completing either 4+2 or 5+1 internship program. A maximum of 2 years of supervision funding support is available.

Travel related reimbursements are as follows:
- accommodation – reimbursed at the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) rate
- airfares - Reasonable cost i.e. economy fares
- private car mileage calculated at the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) rates considered reasonable for claims for domestic travel allowance expenses.
5. What can I study?

Each year, RDN works with stakeholders to identify regional and local health workforce skills/capacity needs through a Primary Health Workforce Needs Assessment (HWNA). The HWNA forms the basis for determining the priorities for the allocation of scholarships and bursaries.

The priority areas of study are:
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- Aged care and associated conditions
- Children and young people
- Chronic disease management
- Mental health and addiction management
- Palliative care
- Procedural training including anaesthetics, surgery, obstetrics, skin cancer, women’s health, or emergency skills. Value limits may apply.

Applications that fall outside of identified primary health workforce needs may not be approved.

6. How do I apply?

You can apply anytime through the RDN website and application portal.

Applications will be assessed based on:
- the location of your employment and services provided
- applicant eligibility criteria
- proposed professional development activity
- planned increase in skill, capacity and/or scope of clinical practice
- meeting one or more identified primary health workforce needs, and
- demonstration of primary health service provision to a rural or remote community or ACCHS.

Submitting your application does not guarantee that you will be offered a scholarship or bursary, and funding is subject to completion of a funding contract once all relevant documentation is received by the HWSP.

7. What is the application process?

Apply online through the RDN Service Portal

You will be required to provide your employment, service locations, qualifications, professional registration, information about the proposed professional development activity and how the proposed activity/skills gained will benefit your community.

Documents you will be requested to upload
- professional registration with AHPRA or relevant professional body
- evidence of course costs – this can be a quote, invoice, flyer of information. Documents which contain only a link to the course website will not be accepted. You do NOT need to have paid for the course at the time of submission
o estimation of travel cost (e.g., flight invoice, quote, route of kms driven)

All applications will be reviewed against the assessment criteria (Item 6 above) and you will be notified of the outcome by email.

If your application is reviewed and provisionally approved
You will receive an email indicating your application has been provisionally approved. This email will request that you upload documents to confirm your employment and course costs.

- Proof of employment – required from each employer
  - document must be on company letterhead from an immediate manager/supervisor or practice manager
  - dated and signed within the past 3 months
  - includes the applicant’s name, position title, hours worked per week at each service location, and length of employment

- Proof of service delivery – business owner / self-employed
  - document on company letterhead
  - copy of business registration and ABN
  - evidence that you are providing at least 15 hours per week of face-to-face primary care clinical services in eligible location/s. Options for this include, but are not limited to, de-identified Medicare billings and/or income statements for the past 3+ months.

- Course costs
  - For scholarships – confirmation of enrolment and course/subject costs from the University/Institution for the course specified in your application. The documentation must include your name, period of study, and enrolled subjects. Generic course information is not acceptable for payments.
  - For bursaries – tax invoice and receipt for payment of course costs. The documentation must be made out to the applicant and include activity/course name, dates and location, activity/course provider ABN and GST details.

- Documents must be submitted directly through the application portal and reviewed. Documents received via email will not be accepted.

- If documents are incorrect or missing information, you will be notified by email with information on what is required.

- If correct documentation is not provided within 28 days, your application will be cancelled.

Once all documentation has been reviewed and approved, a funding contract will be issued.

Issue a funding contract

- Your funding contract will be issued via DocuSign will be received by email.

- The contract will detail the funding allocated for the activity, any Return of Service Obligations (where applicable) and funding terms and conditions.

- You will need to accept the funding contract by electronically signing the document within 21 days of issue. If the contract is not signed within this timeframe, the offer of funding will be withdrawn, and your application cancelled.

Payments

- When the funding contract is accepted, you will receive a request from RDN’s Finance team for your bank details for a direct payment.

- Activities/courses with associated travel or accommodation funding will be paid in 2 instalments. The first instalment will be made upon execution of the contract for
activity/course costs only. The second instalment for travel and accommodation will be paid only after proof of attendance/completion is provided.

**Proof of activity/course completion**

- All funding recipients are required to upload evidence of successful completion of the activity/course within eight weeks of the expected date of completion.
- Failure to provide this evidence within the timeframe will trigger the recovery of allocated funds.

If you need to make any changes to your application (i.e. course dates, location, change of employment, etc.), you must notify hwsp@nswrdn.com.au immediately. There is no guarantee that change requests will be approved within a current application. A new application may be required.

### 8. Return of Service Obligations

A Return of Service Obligation (RoSO) will be applied to all approved Scholarships and to Bursaries over $5,000 or for courses/study longer than six months.

The RoSO will not exceed more than 12 months and must be completed in a MMM 3-7 location, or ACCHS in MMM 1-7 location. The RoSO requirement will be clearly stated in your funding contract with RDN.

Applicants with a RoSO will be case managed and supported during their period of service to ensure they are able to successfully fulfil their commitments.

Where a health professional accepts funding but does not complete the required RoSO requirements as stated in their contract, RDN will recover the funding provided.

Applicants unable to meet their RoSO due to exceptional circumstances may be able to negotiate alternatives to recovery with their RDN case manager. Exceptional circumstances means any circumstances beyond the control of the applicant, which were not reasonably foreseeable by that applicant at the time they entered into the contract and which prevent that applicant from meeting their RoSO requirements.

The RDN case manager will, however, seek to find alternatives to allow the applicant to meet their RoSO before a waiver will be considered. RDN reserves the final right to hold the applicant to their RoSO and can recover the debt where a mutually agreeable outcome cannot be found.

### 9. Case management

Successful applicants will be case managed by RDN throughout their scholarship/bursary activity and subsequent return of service obligation (RoSO).

The case management framework may include:

- The case manager making regular phone/email contact with the applicant to track study progress and determine how new skills are being utilised.
- Support and access to RDN resources that may be relevant to the applicant’s needs.
- Monitoring the progress of postgraduate studies and/or training programs at key milestones.
- Provision of program information and updates to the applicant.
10. Complaints, waivers and appeals

Applicants who wish to appeal the outcome of their unsuccessful application should send an email to hwsp@nswrdn.com.au to explain their situation to the RDN HWSP Program Manager who can help to determine if there are other avenues to access funding and/or support to meet their upskilling or professional development needs.

If the matter is not resolved in this way, applicants can appeal to the RDN Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to consider their case. The RDN CEO is the final arbiter for any appeal on the HWSP.

11. Definitions

**HWSP scholarship:** a payment of up to $10,000 per year for up to two years to support participants to undertake full or part-time studies (maximum of $20,000 in total over two years) to attain the qualification of either a Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, Masters or PhD.

**HWSP bursary:** a one-off payment of up to $10,000 towards the cost of course/conference fees and related expenses such as accommodation and transport, where appropriate.

**Health Workforce Needs Assessment (HWNA):** aggregates evidence themed around primary health care workforce access, quality and sustainability, and identifies issues and trends for these priority areas.

**Retrospective costs:** Costs for courses/activities that have been started or completed prior to submitting an application for funding are retrospective and are not eligible for funding. This includes online self-paced courses where access to course materials is gained immediately upon payment.

**Funding contract:** The contract between the funding recipient and RDN, which documents the funding allocated towards a specific professional development activity and ROSO obligations, if applicable.

**Postgraduate:** a level of qualification offered by education providers. Postgraduate qualifications are open to people who already hold undergraduate (Bachelor) degrees and/or, in many cases, people who can demonstrate equivalent experience in the workplace. You do not always need qualifications to be eligible to study for a postgraduate Certificate, Diploma or Master. Many universities and training organisations will recognise your career to date as prior learning and admit you to postgraduate study on that basis.

**Case management:** the process of mutual engagement between RDN and the applicant to ensure the right level of support and mutual responsibility is in place for a successful study outcome.

**Return of Service Obligation (RoSO):** the commitment made by a participant to the Australian Government when accepting public money by continuing to provide services in a MMM 3-7 location, or ACCHS in a MMM 1-7 location.

**Exceptional circumstances:** any circumstance/s beyond the control of the participant, which were not reasonably foreseeable by that participant at the time they entered into the contract and which prevent that participant from meeting their RO SO.