



STRONGER RURAL HEALTH STRATEGY

Medicare Benefits Schedule updates

As part of the Stronger Rural Health Strategy announced in the 2018-19 Budget, the Government is reforming Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item fee arrangements for non-vocationally recognised general practitioners (non-VR GPs).

The changes will ensure that MBS fees payable reflect recognised levels of expertise, reward and incentivise investment in postgraduate specialist qualifications, and encourage more doctors to work in regional, rural and remote areas.

Who will be affected by the changes?

The new fee structure and access arrangements will affect all non-VR GPs (other than those participating on approved training programs).

There are **no** changes to the MBS fees payable to VR (Fellowed) GPs or to registrars training on the Australian General Practice Training Program, Remote Vocational Training Scheme and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Independent Pathway.

What are the fee structure changes?

A new MBS item group will establish differential (tiered) rebates on GP items for non-VR GPs that integrate an incentive for doctors to become fully qualified and to work where they are needed most.

New MBS items have been created under Group A7 – Acupuncture and non-Specialist Practitioner items. These items replicate the General Practice items under Schedule A of the MBS, and set the relevant item fee at 80% of the equivalent VR item.

Will these fees be indexed?

When indexation is applied to the higher value VR items, the non-VR items will also be adjusted to maintain parity.

What about the Other Medical Practitioner programs?

Associated with the new fee structure is the discontinuation of the Other Medical Practitioner (OMP) programs (After Hours OMPs, Medicare Plus for OMPs, Outer Metropolitan OMPs and Rural OMPs), which currently allow eligible non-VR GPs to access 100% of the fee for VR GP items.

As of 1 November 2018, no new participants will be admitted to OMPs programs. Under a grandfathering arrangement, doctors who are participating on one of the OMPs programs will be given up to 30 June 2023 to fulfil their commitment to obtain fellowship. Subject to continuing compliance with program guidelines and rules, these non-VR GPs will retain their current access to higher level items during the grandfathering period (see table below).

How will grandfathering work?

The grandfathering arrangement is strictly limited. The 30 June 2023 deadline is absolute and grandfathering will not necessarily extend to all OMPs participants for the full period.

Participants will need to continue to comply with the relevant program guidelines and rules to stay on a program, and current program time limits will remain in place. For example, doctors on the AHOMPs program will need to continue to work towards Fellowship, and will not automatically be granted an extension if they reach their six-year cap during the grandfathering period.

If a grandfathered OMPs participant has not gained Fellowship and become vocationally recognised by 30 June 2023, they will revert to the new fee arrangements for non-VR GPs. (MOMPs program participants recognised as having completed their five-year service requirement as at 30 June 2023 will continue to have access to the higher rebates indefinitely.)

Will non-VR doctors be given any support to obtain Fellowship?

A Non-VR Fellowship Support program will be available to assist doctors to obtain Fellowship. The Program will be delivered through both the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM).

The program delivered by the RACGP in 2019 will be a pilot (limited to 400 places) and it will be delivered in partnership with Regional Training Organisations. For more information on support through the RACGP, please contact the College at pathwayadmin@racgp.org.au.

For more information on support through the ACRRM, or if you would like to register your interest with the College, please contact ACRRM directly at acrrm@acrrm.org.au.

When do the changes come into effect?

The new fee structure will be introduced on 1 July 2018 and will apply to all services performed on and from that date.

I am a OMPs participant, what can I bill from 1 July 2018?

Subject to compliance with program guidelines, if you are participating in one of the OMPs programs, you can continue to bill the existing higher value GP items until your grandfathering finishes.

I am a non-VR GP, but I'm not on a OMPs program. What can I bill from 1 July 2018?

If you are a non-VR GP who is **not** participating in a OMPs program, your eligibility to bill the new items will depend on where you are practising.

Non-VR GPs practising in metropolitan areas (Modified Monash 1) will not be able to use **all** of the new items. They will be able to:

- Continue to use A2 items for standard GP services (at the current 60% of the VR rate);
- Continue to use A19 items for attendances associated with Practice Incentive Payments (at the current 60% of the VR rate); and
- For all other services they will be able to use the relevant subgroups under A7 (at 80% of the VR rate).

Non-VR GPs providing services in Modified Monash 2–7 locations will be able to access all of the new items under Group A7 they are eligible for¹. See table below.

The Modified Monash (MM) designation of any location can be identified using the DoctorConnect locator map at www.doctorconnect.gov.au/locator. See table below.

¹ Some items, for example Mental Health items – require the practitioner to have undertaken specific training.

MBS item group eligibility – non VR practitioners and OMPs participants

Service type	MM 1 locations	MM 2-7 locations	OMPs participant
Standard GP Consults	A2	A7.2	A1
Prolonged Consults	A7.3	A7.3	A5
Group Therapy	A7.4	A7.4	A6
Health Assessment	A7.5	A7.5	A14
Chronic Disease Management	A7.6	A7.6	A15
Medication Management	A7.7	A7.7	A17
Standard GP Consults (PIP)	A19	A7.8	A18
Mental Health	A7.9	A7.9	A20
Standard After Hours	A7.10	A7.10	A22
Pregnancy Support	A7.11 (must meet item credentialing)	A7.11 (must meet item credentialing)	A27 (must meet item credentialing)
Video Conference	A7.12	A7.12	A30

Please note, individual items can be found at www.mbsonline.gov.au.

I work mostly during the After-Hours period, what about the Urgent After-Hours?

No changes are being made to the eligibility for Urgent After-Hours items under Group A11 of the MBS.

Where do I find more information?

- For more information on the OMPs programs and grandfathering arrangements, go to www.health.gov.au/omps
- For more information on how to use the new items, go to www.mbsonline.gov.au
- For any other questions, please contact the Department at Access.Programs@health.gov.au