

Section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act 1973

Under Section 19AB of the [Health Insurance Act 1973](#), international medical graduates (IMGs) are restricted on where they can work and access Medicare benefits for a period of 10 years.

An IMG is classified as a person who:

- completed a medical degree outside of Australia or New Zealand
- completed a medical degree in Australia or New Zealand as a temporary resident.

The 10 year moratorium

IMGs are required to work in a Distribution Priority Area (DPA) if they are a GP or a District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) area if they are a non-GP specialist for at least 10 years.

Known as the 10 year moratorium, the restrictions remain in place until the service period is completed and the doctor becomes a permanent resident or Australian citizen.

After the doctor becomes a permanent resident or citizen, Medicare must be advised because this impacts access to Medicare benefits and billing.

If the doctor becomes a permanent resident and does not have a fellowship qualification, they will need to be on an approved workforce training program under Section 19AA to maintain access to Medicare benefits.

The moratorium restrictions will continue to apply for temporary residents, until they become a permanent resident or citizen.

10 year moratorium scaling

Through 10 year moratorium scaling, GPs and non-GP specialists can work in more remote locations to reduce the amount of time they are required to work in DPA and DWS areas by up to 5 years.

Moratorium scaling will be applied when IMGs meet the following conditions:

- Work is undertaken in an eligible regional or remote area under Section 19AB.
- Claims are submitted for Medicare Benefit Schedule items for services provided.
- There is a monthly billing threshold of \$5,000.

Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors Scheme

The Five Year Overseas Trained Doctors (OTD) Scheme provides incentives for IMGs working in remote areas, which can reduce the 10 year moratorium restriction of Section 19AB.

To satisfy the eligibility criteria for the Five Year OTD Scheme, a doctor must:

- have recognised general practice training and qualifications falling within Category 1 or Category 2 of the Australian Medical Council Specialist Pathway
- provide evidence they are eligible to be assessed for Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners or Fellowship of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine within two years of commencing on the Scheme
- hold or obtain appropriate registration with the Medical Board of Australia
- intend to seek or currently possess permanent residency and/or Australian citizenship
- provide at least seven sessions per week as part of their placement.

IMGs who are participating in the Five Year OTD Scheme are not eligible to receive scaling credits towards their 10 year moratorium.

Section 19AB exemptions

IMGs may be exempt from Section 19AB and be eligible to receive a Medicare number when they:

- work in a DPA or DWS for their medical speciality
- undertake an approved workforce training program that meets the requirements of Section 19AA
- work at an ATSI Primary Health Service that holds an exemption under Section 19(2) of the Health Insurance Act 1973
- have an exemption to access Assistance at Operations Medicare items
- are employed at an Australian medical school to perform clinical services as part of an academic appointment and satisfy the requirements for an academic exemption under Section 19AA
- work in specialities where there is acute shortage
- work as a locum for up to 6 months whilst looking for a position classified as DPA or DWS

- apply for a spousal exemption to work within reasonable distance of their spouse's primary place of employment
- replace another doctor who was working under an unrestricted 19AB exemption

Applying for a Section 19AB exemption

The application for a Section 19AB exemption can be completed when applying for a Medicare provider number with Services Australia. The application will be processed within 28 days.

Section 19AB exemptions will not be backdated under any circumstances. Doctors must hold a valid Medicare provider number and Section 19AB exemption before consulting patients or they will incur debt for any services provided.

Further information

To find out more about Section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act 1973, visit the links below:

- [Section 19AB](#)
- [Health Workforce Locator](#)
- [Applying for a Medicare Provider Number](#)
- [Five Year OTD Scheme Guidelines](#)

Whilst all care has been taken in preparing this document, this information is a guide only and subject to change without notice.

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