

Medical Board of Australia consultation on the funding of external doctors' health programs

Submission received from: [The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists](#)

Question 1: Is there a need for health programs?

Do you see any value in, or need for external health programs for medical students and/or doctors? Please explain your reasoning

There is great value in, and need for, external health programs for medical students, doctors and trainees. These services should be run through medical colleges or independent agencies.

The Dr Doc program in general practice has been very good, but again needs to be run through independent agencies as these are removed from government and provide a degree of independence.

Valuable programs such as these should not be seen as an arm of the government and raises serious concerns over confidentiality.

Personal health is a very sensitive matter, whether you are a doctor or not, and requires a relationship of trust.

Question 2: Preferred model for external health programs

Of the existing models in Australia as described above, is there a model that you would prefer to see adopted nationally? Is there an alternative model that you would like to see adopted nationally?

A model based on the current programs, including but not limited to, the Dr Doc program with a degree of flexibility would be ideal and allows for support in a way that is seen as necessary. It should include;

- * Administration support for doctors*
- * Health checks for doctors and spouses*
- * Education seminars for doctors, including sessions on general health and stress*
- * A telephone hot line*

Question 3: The role of the Board in funding external health programs

Do you believe that it is the role of the Board to fund external health programs?

No. The Board is supported by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). This raises concerns about maintaining independence and confidentiality for the doctors concerned from a national body which has not yet demonstrated stability or maturity in transition. Further, it will bring about an increase in, already inflated, medical registration fees.

Question 4: Range of services provided by doctors' health programs

What services should be provided by doctors' health programs. In addition to the ones you have selected, what other services (if any) should be provided by doctors' health programs?

Telephone advice during office hours

Telephone advice available 24/7

Referral to expert practitioners for assessment and management

Develop and maintain a list of practitioners who are willing to treat colleagues

Education services for medical practitioners and medical students to raise awareness of health issues for the medical profession and to encourage practitioners and students to have a general practitioner

Programs to enhance the skills of medical practitioners who assess and manage the health of doctors

Follow up of all participants contacting or attending the service

Publication of resources – maintaining a website, newsletters, journal articles

Question 5: Funding

How much of an increase in registration fees is acceptable to you, to fund doctors' health services?

Nil

Question 6: Other comments

Do you have any other comments or feedback about external health programs?

The College supports these vital early intervention services and education for doctors, medical students and trainees and would like to see them funded separately in every state, independent of AHPRA.

Above all, the confidentiality and independence that make these schemes so effective, must not be compromised.