



Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme Existing Participants

On 1 January 2020, the Bonded Medical Program (Program) new arrangement came into effect. Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) students will be eligible to opt in at any time after completion of their medical course. All other MRBS participants are eligible to opt in from 1 January 2020.

The Bonded Medical Program, established in 2001, provides students with a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) in a medical course at an Australian university, in return for a commitment to work in eligible regional, rural or remote areas for a specified period after completion of their medical course.

This commitment is referred to as a Return of Service Obligation (RoSO).

The Program provides:

- a standard 3 year RoSO to be completed over an 18 year period
- a more flexible approach in undertaking RoSO, where RoSO can be on a non-continuous basis, full-time or part-time work, and fly in/fly out work in eligible locations
- clear and consistent processes to assist participants in managing their obligations using an online web portal to facilitate easier self-management of RoSO

The Bonded Return of Service System

To support the new arrangement, the Department of Health online web portal, the Bonded Return of Service System (BRoSS), will allow bonded students and doctors to self-manage their RoSO and identify eligible locations where they can work. Functions of BRoSS will be released throughout 2020. Further information will be communicated to all participants as features become available.

Key features of the new arrangement

RoSO

- a standard 3 year RoSO (reduced from 4-6 years)
- RoSO can be reduced by 1:1 credit for all RoSO worked under previous arrangements
- eligible locations for bonded participants are classified using any of the following: Modified Monash Model (MMM) 2-7; Distribution Priority areas (DPA) for General Practitioners; and Outer Metropolitan District of Workforce Shortage for all other specialties
- fellowship (medical specialisation) is not essential to complete RoSO

Time frames

- 3 year RoSO completed within 18 years of finishing your medical course
- 18 months RoSO can be worked pre-fellowship and 18 months post-fellowship
- if fellowship is not attained by the end of the 12th year after completion of the medical course, all RoSO must be completed within the remaining 6 years of the 18 year time frame

Administration

- clear processes for consideration of exceptional circumstance to extend the time frame to complete RoSO for medical reasons
- clearer consistent management of withdrawals
- breach is triggered by a failure to: complete the medical course within university requirements and time frame or complete all RoSO obligations within 18 years of completing the medical course
- breach will result in a 6 year Medicare ban (reduced from 12 years)

Support

Rural Workforce Agencies in each State and the Northern Territory will provide support to participants throughout each phase of the Program.

Opt in considerations for existing participants

MRBS Scheme students will be eligible to opt in any time after completion of their medical course. All other MRBS Scheme participants are eligible to opt in from 1 January 2020. Opt in is voluntary. Participants who choose not to opt in will keep their existing contract. The decision to opt in will depend on the benefits the new arrangement offers a participant and the current stage or phase of their existing arrangement. All participants are encouraged to keep their existing contract obligations up to date.

How to opt in

From 1 January 2020, eligible participants will be able to email the department at BRoSS@health.gov.au advising they would like to opt in.

The department will review the participant's record to check all current obligations are up to date. Participants will be notified of their eligibility to opt in to the new arrangement and will be provided with log in details for BRoSS. Existing participants will be required to log in to BRoSS within 3 months of receiving the email to review and agree to participate in the Program. Once this is complete, the participant has entered the Program under the new arrangement.

What to do if your existing obligations under your contract are not up to date

Participants can contact the MRBS team at the Department to discuss available options. This is recommended regardless of whether a participant chooses to opt in to the new arrangement or stay on their existing contract.

While BRoSS is being progressively released throughout 2020, your reporting obligations as specified in the *Health Insurance (Bonded Medical Program) Rule 2020* are delayed.

The timelines set by the *Health Insurance (Bonded Medical Program) Rule 2020 (Cth)* that require the participant to provide information and evidence under sections 15 and 16 will be delayed until a future date nominated by the department.

The department has implemented a transition period where the participant's obligations to provide information and upload evidence will be delayed until BRoSS is fully functional.

The Rule has been amended to formally establish this transition period, which means current participants of the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) and Bonded Medical Places (BMP) schemes who have opted in to the Program cannot be liable for any administrative penalty arising out of not complying with time frames set out in the Rule. The amendment, *Health Insurance (Bonded Medical Program) Amendment Rule 2020*, is available at Federal Register of Legislative Instruments for your information.

The department will advise you when BRoSS is fully functional and will nominate a date from which all the time frames for providing information and evidence will commence.

We encourage you to keep your Program reporting obligations up to date, by email to BRoSS@health.gov.au

Further information

Department of Health website: health.gov.au/new-arrangements-bonded-medical-program

Contact the Department of Health

- MRBS Information Phone Line: 1800 248 720 (Monday – Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm AEST)
- Email: MRBScholarships@health.gov.au