

# Medicare restrictions preventing GPs from assisting with COVID-19 crisis

A strong, flexible GP workforce is critical to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, however many GPs wanting to help face a 6-8 week wait before they can move to practices with the greatest need.

Medical clinics have been thrown into chaos, some are experiencing high demand, and others are getting quieter by the day. GPs need to be able to quickly and easily change their working location to meet the changing demand, and to assist with COVID-19 clinics.

However, many GPs (such as those still completing their 10-year moratorium or Australia GPs who have not set up PRODA) currently face a 6-8 week wait to get a '6-month locum provider number' allowing them to temporarily change their working location. Simple changes for areas currently in a state of emergency, could immediately free up highly qualified GPs to work in places where the needs are greatest.

"There are quick changes to bureaucratic systems that could mobilise dozens of qualified GPs within days" says Martina Stanley from Alecto Australia, a specialist consultant for General Practices.

"Many of these GPs are currently sitting at home unable to work because they cannot meet the new stringent requirements designed to keep them out of our cities and suburbs. Many of them would be willing to work in clinics where there is increased risk or demand. Some are willing to work in the proposed fever clinics"

Doctors changing location currently need to wait 6-8 weeks for a new Medicare Provider Number.

"Current Medicare application processes have slowed to the point where it is taking 35 days for an application for a provider number to be opened – processing may take an additional 1-2 weeks", says Ms Stanley, "GP practices around the country are asking us for GPs who can help quickly. We cannot provide a much-needed service unless the processes are expedited".

"A simple decision from the Department of Health in Canberra, would allow provider numbers to be processed within a few days and allow a critically important workforce to be available immediately to the community."

Additional delays are being caused due to new processes forced on the RACGP. This means that UK GPs with recognised specialist qualifications are taking up to six months to go through a desktop assessment process.

"We are fully committed to screening of GPs to ensure that the standards of service are not lessened during a crisis. We are simply asking for restrictions on the distribution of GPs to be loosened up to allow doctors to support our community during a crisis."

## Ends

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