



ALECTO
— Australia



Living & Working in Australia

Welcome to the land of kangaroos, stunning landscapes, and a healthcare system that's as diverse as the Great Barrier Reef.

Australia is not just a place; it's a lifestyle. So, whether you're drawn to its vibrant cities, the laidback coastal regions, or the vast outback, this country offers a lifestyle that blends work and play seamlessly.

The demand for general practitioners in Australia remains high, with the Australian Medical Association (AMA) projecting a shortfall of as many as 10,600 GPs by 2031. Even the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) reports that the need for more GPs is likely to continue.

[Download
GP Salary
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Average
GP Salary
(7 Sessions or
more per week)

\$365K



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With a growing and aging population, there's an ever-increasing need for healthcare professionals, making it an opportune time for international medical graduates (IMGs) or overseas trained doctors (OTDs) to make their mark in the local healthcare scene.

In this guide, we'll dive into the essential details that will help you navigate the unique nuances of the Australian healthcare system. From understanding the registration process and accreditation requirements to insights on the Medicare system and cultural considerations in patient care, we've got you covered.

We'll also explore the vast landscape of GP opportunities in Australia — from urban medical centres to regional practices — and provide tips on making a smooth transition into the Australian medical workforce.

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Understanding the Australian Healthcare System

When it comes to working as a GP in Australia and the Australian healthcare system, two major players take the stage: the public sector and the private sector. Understanding the dynamics between these realms is crucial for any general practitioner looking to make a mark in the country's medical landscape.

Public vs. Private Sector Healthcare

The public sector forms the backbone of healthcare accessibility in Australia. Government-funded hospitals and medical facilities provide essential services to the majority of the population. Here, patients can access medical care without hefty out-of-pocket expenses, thanks to the Medicare system.

On the flipside, the private insurance typically covers secondary/hospital care only (health insurance doesn't cover GP consults for Australian permanent residents or citizens). Private hospitals are scattered across the country, catering to those who seek additional services beyond what the public system provides.

Patients often opt for private health insurance due to tax incentives, and the private system grants them access to a more extensive range of medical services and allows them to choose their preferred healthcare providers.





Medicare System — The Basics

Established in 1984, Medicare is the country's public healthcare scheme, ensuring that all citizens and permanent residents have access to a wide range of medical services at little to no cost. This includes visits to general practitioners, public hospitals, and the subsidisation of prescription medications.

As a GP, understanding how Medicare works is paramount. It plays a pivotal role in shaping your GP practice, patient interactions, and overall financial structure.

Here's how Medicare impacts GPs in their practice:

Billing and Reimbursement: Medicare forms the backbone of billing for GPs. A portion of Australian GPs engage in bulk billing, a system where they bill Medicare directly for their services. This means that patients can visit a GP without having to pay anything out of pocket, as Medicare covers the cost. Please note Medicare does not cover temporary residents.

Bulk Billing and Patient Accessibility: Bulk billing enhances patient accessibility to healthcare services. GPs who bulk bill make medical care more affordable and accessible, especially for those who might face financial constraints. It's a practice that fosters widespread healthcare availability across diverse socio-economic backgrounds.



- Mixed billing practices (which are the most common option) charge patients according to their ability to pay. Typically in a mixed billing practice children, elderly and low income patients are bulk billed (no cost to see the GP). But everyone that falls outside of these categories is charged a gap payment to see the GP. Typically the gap payment is around \$A40-50.
- In a private billing practice all patients are charged a gap fee to see a GP.



- **Medicare Rebates and Gap Fees:** While bulk billing is common, some GPs may charge a gap fee. This is the difference between the Medicare rebate (the amount covered by the government) and the total cost of the consultation. GPs need to strike a balance here, ensuring they remain financially viable while considering the impact of gap fees on patient affordability and satisfaction.
- **Chronic Disease Management and Allied Health Services:** Medicare supports GPs in managing chronic diseases through specific care plans. GPs can coordinate patient care with other healthcare providers, such as physiotherapists or dietitians, and claim Medicare rebates for these allied health services. This collaborative approach fosters comprehensive patient care.
- **Preventive Care and Immunisations:** Medicare encourages GPs to focus on preventive care, including immunisations. Vaccinations for eligible patients are often bulk-billed, fostering public health initiatives and disease prevention on a broader scale.
- **Access to Medical Tests and Procedures:** GPs can order a range of medical tests and procedures for their patients, and Medicare often covers these services. This ensures that patients can undergo necessary diagnostic procedures without facing significant financial burdens.



- **Incentives and Programs:** Medicare provides various incentives and programs to encourage GPs to participate in specific healthcare initiatives. This may include participation in training programs, rural and remote healthcare services, and specialised care initiatives.



The Role of General Practitioners in Australian Healthcare

GPs are the frontline heroes of the Australian healthcare system, playing a central role in providing primary care, preventive services, and ongoing medical management. Their responsibilities are diverse, extending beyond mere diagnosis and treatment to encompass holistic patient care and community health promotion.

GP Responsibilities and Services

If you're planning to work as general practitioner in Australia, knowing the responsibilities and typical services involved is crucial. These include:

- **Primary Care and Diagnosis:** GPs are often the first point of contact for individuals seeking healthcare. They conduct comprehensive assessments, diagnose illnesses, and manage a wide array of medical conditions. Their expertise spans across various medical fields, allowing them to address a broad spectrum of health issues.
- **Chronic Disease Management:** GPs are instrumental in managing chronic conditions. They develop care plans, coordinate with specialists, and monitor patients with long-term health issues, ensuring a cohesive and effective approach to ongoing healthcare.
- **Preventive Care and Health Promotion:** Prevention is key, and GPs play a crucial role in promoting healthy lifestyles and disease prevention. This includes recommending screenings, vaccinations, and lifestyle modifications to enhance people's overall well-being.
- **Mental Health Support:** GPs are often the first point of contact for individuals dealing with mental health concerns. They provide initial assessments, offer counselling, and coordinate with mental health specialists when necessary.





- **Women's and Men's Health:** GPs address a range of gender-specific health issues, from reproductive health and family planning to men's health concerns. They conduct routine screenings, provide advice on contraception, and monitor aspects like prostate health.

Working in a Practice vs. Hospitals or Clinics

Unsure about how to work as a GP in Australia? Or whether working in a practice, clinic or hospital would be the right fit?

Here's an overview of what you can expect should you come to a decision or want to experience all three scenarios.

- **General Practice:** The majority of GPs in Australia work in private or group practices. This setting allows for continuity of care, as GPs build ongoing relationships with their patients. They often manage a diverse caseload, from acute illnesses to chronic conditions, and contribute to the overall health of their local communities.
- **Hospitals and Clinics:** Some GPs choose to work in hospitals or larger healthcare clinics. In these settings, GPs may be involved in more acute care, collaborate with specialists, and contribute to multidisciplinary teams. This environment can provide exposure to a broader range of medical cases.
- **Rural and Remote Practices:** GPs also play a crucial role in addressing healthcare gaps in rural and remote areas. Working in these settings often involves a more varied caseload, with GPs acting as primary healthcare providers for entire communities.



As you can see, the role of GPs in Australian healthcare is dynamic and multifaceted.

Whether in private practice, hospitals, or rural clinics, GPs are instrumental in delivering comprehensive, patient-centred care, and promoting the health and well-being of the Australian population.



Opportunities for International Medical Graduates (IMGs) and Overseas Trained Doctors (OTDs)

For OTDs and IMGs, knowing the requirements to work as a GP in Australia and understanding the intricacies of work locations is paramount. The regulatory landscape, primarily governed by Section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act of 1973, shapes where these doctors can practice.

19AB Restrictions

Section 19AB is a crucial aspect of the Australian healthcare landscape. It imposes restrictions on OTDs in terms of where they can practice. Specifically, OTDs are required to work in **District of Workforce Shortage (DWS)** or **Distribution Priority Area (DPA)** locations for a set period before gaining unrestricted access to practise anywhere in Australia.

Take note that the DWS category applies to specialist medical practitioners whereas the DPA classification is used in relation to general practitioners.

These 19AB restrictions are designed to address healthcare workforce distribution imbalances, ensuring that doctors are strategically placed where their services are most needed.

The DPA and Moratorium

Distribution priority areas (DPAs) are specific geographical regions in Australia where there is a recognised need for additional general practitioner services.

The moratorium is a crucial aspect for IMG GPs who are subject to the 19AB restrictions. It specifies a period during which doctors must work in DPA locations or hold another 19AB exemption before gaining unrestricted access to practice anywhere in Australia. The goal here is for GPs to transition to non-DPA locations after fulfilling the 10-year mandatory period in a DPA.





Moratorium Exemptions Post-PEP

Following the completion of the Professional Evaluation Program (PEP Specialist Stream) with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) may provide exemptions from 19AB restrictions and the moratorium. This allows IMG GPs to explore work opportunities in non-DPA locations.

However, it should be noted that even in such cases, IMG GPs will still need to work in true DPA locations for the first 12 months or so whilst completing their PEP Specialist Stream program.

The landscape can vary across different states and territories, and exemptions may not apply uniformly.

Aspiring GPs should navigate these regulations carefully, consulting with relevant authorities and staying informed about updates and changes.

Job Opportunities in DPAs

For IMGs subject to 19AB restrictions, job opportunities in DPAs offer a pathway to contribute to underserved communities in Australia. Since DPAs are designated regions with a recognized shortage of medical practitioners, there is a high demand for GPs in these areas, creating numerous job opportunities for IMGs.

Various government initiatives and programs aim to attract and retain healthcare professionals in DPAs. This can include financial incentives, infrastructure development, and support for healthcare facilities.

Additionally, private practices in DPAs may actively seek IMG GPs to address the shortage of healthcare providers. Working in a private setting allows GPs to build a patient base and establish long-term relationships with the community.





What It's Like to Work as a Locum GP

For GPs, the locum lifestyle offers a dynamic and flexible way to practice medicine.

Locum GPs step into various roles temporarily, covering for regular practitioners during periods of leave or staffing shortages.

GPs coming from overseas typically have the opportunity to explore locum opportunities after completing the PEP Specialist Stream with the RACGP, usually following a year of working in Australia.

Below are some key aspects of working as a locum GP:

- **Diverse Experiences:** Locum GPs experience a variety of patient cases, practice settings, and healthcare systems, enhancing their skills and adaptability.
- **Flexibility:** Locum work offers GPs the freedom to choose when and where they work, providing control over their schedules.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Locum roles provide chances to build professional networks and connections within the healthcare community.

While the locum lifestyle can be rewarding, it also comes with challenges such as adjusting quickly to new environments, building rapport with unfamiliar patients, and managing the variability of workloads.



Job Opportunities for GPs in Rural Areas

GPs willing to embrace rural practice contribute significantly to healthcare accessibility in regional and remote areas. Rural general practice offers unique experiences and opportunities to make a lasting impact on smaller communities.



Key Aspects of Job Opportunities in Rural Areas:

- **Community Engagement:** Rural GPs often develop strong connections with their communities, becoming trusted figures in local healthcare.
- **Diverse Practice:** Rural GPs handle a wide range of cases, combining primary care with emergency and procedural medicine.
- **Incentives and Support:** Some programs offer financial incentives, scholarships, or relocation support to encourage GPs to work in rural areas

Financial Prospects: GP Earnings in Australia

The financial prospects for general practitioners in Australia are generally favourable, reflecting the essential role they play in the healthcare system. However, earnings can vary based on factors such as experience, location, type of practice, and the specific arrangements with healthcare providers.

The earnings of GPs in Australia can vary widely. On average, a GP with several years of experience can earn a competitive salary.

View our [GP Salary in Australia](#) page for information on GP earnings in Australia.

Of course, these figures are general estimates, and actual earnings can vary based on individual circumstances..

GPs in Australia enjoy a high level of professional autonomy and the potential for financial success, but it's important to carefully consider factors like overhead costs, patient demographics, and the local healthcare landscape when evaluating their financial prospects.





Pathways for Overseas Trained Doctors to Work as GP in Australia

For overseas trained doctors aspiring to work as GPs in Australia, navigating the qualification, registration, and migration processes is essential.

Qualifications and Registration Process

Many OTDs from UK, Ireland, New Zealand and select other countries, enter the Australian medical workforce through the RACGP PEP Specialist Stream. This is a comprehensive program that includes assessments, supervision, and training to facilitate integration into the Australian healthcare system. These OTDs are not required to complete exams if they are found to be substantially comparable.

Other OTDs must have their medical qualifications recognised by the Australian Medical Council (AMC). This often involves completing the AMC exams, including the AMC multiple choice-question exam and the clinical exam.

Other requirements include:

- **English Language Proficiency:** Adequate proficiency in English is crucial. Most OTDs need to demonstrate their language skills by passing the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Occupational English Test (OET).
- **Australian Medical Board Registration:** Successful completion of the AMC exams and proof of English proficiency allows OTDs to apply for registration with the Medical Board or Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Registration is a prerequisite for practicing medicine in Australia.



Migration Information and Visa Options

IMGs who wish to begin working as a GP in Australia need to take note of the following migration information and visa options:

- **Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) Visa (Subclass 482):** The TSS visa allows employers to sponsor overseas workers for up to four years. OTDs may be sponsored by healthcare providers to work as GPs, provided they meet the relevant criteria. This is by far the most common visa utilised by employers looking to recruit GPs from overseas. It is generally easy to apply for, and processed quickly.
- **Permanent Residency:** Achieving permanent residency provides GPs with long-term stability in Australia. GPs with Specialist registration in Australia that are under the age of 44, are generally able to obtain PR easily in Australia. OTDs can explore pathways such as the Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) Visa (Subclass 186) or the Skilled Independent visa (Subclass 189) for this purpose.

Navigating these pathways requires careful consideration of individual circumstances, qualifications, and preferences. OTDs would do well to seek guidance from relevant authorities, such as registered migration agents and the Department of Home Affairs to ensure a smooth transition into Australia

Immigration law in Australia is subject to changes from time to time .



Living in Australia as a GP

Once you decide and are able to work as general practitioner in Australia, where to live is sure to be a primary consideration.

To help you out, here's some quick info you might find handy:

- Australia's largest cities, **Sydney and Melbourne**, offer diverse cultural experiences, vibrant lifestyles, and numerous healthcare facilities. However, the cost of living can be relatively high. Melbourne has 4 distinct seasons, but overall is a cooler climate than the other capital cities.
- **Brisbane** is known for its pleasant climate, top-notch city amenities and a more relaxed lifestyle.
- **Perth** is located on the west coast, and boasts beautiful beaches, plenty of outdoor activities and good quality of life. It's proximity to South East Asia, makes it an attractive choice for many GPs.
- **Adelaide** is recognised for its affordability and a strong sense of community, offering a more relaxed pace of living compared to larger cities.
- **Canberra**, the capital city, provides a unique blend of urban amenities and a quieter atmosphere.

Work-Life Balance: What to Expect

GPs in Australia typically have structured working hours, offering a good work-life balance.



While some may work evenings or weekends, the standard schedule allows for a balanced lifestyle. GPs often have flexibility in choosing their practice settings, allowing for a balance between professional and personal life. Options include private practice, group practice, or even locum work.

Australian healthcare emphasises patient-centred care, providing GPs with the opportunity to build strong doctor-patient relationships and contribute positively to community health.



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Cost of Living and Financial Planning

The cost of living in Australia varies depending on the city and lifestyle. While larger cities like Sydney and Melbourne typically have higher living costs, regional areas and smaller cities may offer more affordability.

GPs in Australia generally have good earning potential. Financial planning is crucial, taking into account factors like taxes, insurance, and savings. Many GPs engage financial advisors to ensure effective long-term planning.

Population and Cultural Diversity

Australia is known for its multicultural society, with a diverse population representing various ethnicities and cultures. This diversity is reflected in the patient population GPs serve.

Therefore, GPs are encouraged to develop cultural competence to provide effective and sensitive care to patients from diverse backgrounds. This includes understanding cultural nuances and communication preferences.

Jumpstart Your Journey To Australia With Alecto Today!

