



Frequently Asked Questions for participants of the Rural Procedural Grants Program during the COVID-19 pandemic

Can I still access RPGP grant payments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

While rural procedural GPs are still able to register for and claim under the RPGP, we recognise that due to the social distancing and movement restrictions that have been put in place to respond to COVID-19, rural procedural GPs may not be able to access CPD activities that meet the eligibility requirements to receive grant support under the RPGP. In particular, it may be difficult to access training with the requisite level of face-to-face contact.

The government is addressing this by providing some added flexibility to the types of CPD activities that are eligible for the RPGP. Until 31 December 2020, certain CPD activities that are delivered online are eligible for grant support under the RPGP. These flexibilities are outlined in a COVID-19 addendum to the RPGP guidelines.

The government has also decided to delay the implementation of some changes to participant eligibility that were planned for mid-2020, which will target the program to vocationally recognised GPs practising in regions classified as Modified Monash Model (MMM) 3 – 7. These changes will be deferred until 1 January 2021.

What additional flexibilities will be available under the RPGP during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Until 31 December 2020, a temporary arrangement will be in place where a partial grant payment of \$1,000 per day will be paid for online CPD activities that have been deemed eligible by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) or Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). Courses must include an interactive component and/or assessment and meet all other course eligibility requirements of the RPGP.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic some RPGP program reforms that were planned to commence on 1 July 2020 have been postponed until 1 January 2021. However, some important reforms will still go ahead as planned.

From 1 July 2020, GPs practising emergency medicine will be able to access an additional 3 days of grant support per financial year to undertake CPD activities in emergency mental health. This is in addition to the 3 days already available for emergency medicine.

Grant payment processing responsibility will also be transferring from Services Australia to RACGP and ACRRM from 1 July 2020. This is an administrative change that will not impact on RPGP participants.

Planned eligibility changes that will target the program to vocationally recognised GPs practising in regions classified as Modified Monash Model (MMM) 3 – 7 will be delayed until 1 January 2021.

Why has a new emergency mental health component been introduced from 1 July 2020?

The 2017 Nous Review identified mental health as a key health need among rural communities, with GPs working in emergency medicine often the front line for dealing with rural patients suffering from mental health problems and substance abuse. This reform provides capacity for GPs working in emergency medicine to access additional grant payments for building and maintaining their skills in mental health.

As of 1 July 2020 GPs working in emergency medicine can claim 3 days of grant support for CPD activities in emergency mental health per financial year, at a rate of \$2,000 per day. This is in addition to the 3 days already available for emergency medicine.

This is available to emergency medicine GPs who are responsible for providing care in respect of emergency mental health services and in crisis intervention for patients presenting with acute mental health issues. Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the program guidelines.

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following flexibility also applies to this new component until 31 December 2020:

- Eligible GPs can claim grant support of \$1,000 a day for online CPD activities relating to emergency mental health, up to a maximum of \$3,000. Activities must be deemed eligible by the RACGP and/or ACRRM and must include an interactive component and/or assessment.

My face-to-face training has now been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, are there any other training options that I may be able to claim for?

During the current COVID-19 restrictions that prevent GPs attending face-to-face CPD activities or where the activities have been revised to remove a face-to-face component of the activity, online training may be accepted as an eligible CPD activity and support payments can be paid to participants.

A partial grant payment of \$1,000 per day will be paid for CPD activities delivered online. Courses must be approved by the colleges and include an interactive component and/or assessment. Other eligibility criteria outlined in the RPGP program guidelines will still apply. Until 31 December 2020 participants will be able to claim up to the following grant thresholds for the online component:

- Procedural component – \$10,000
- Emergency medicine – \$3,000
- Emergency mental health – \$3,000 (from 1 July 2020)

Participants are still able to claim up to the maximum yearly threshold (\$20,000 for procedural GPs/\$6,000 for emergency medicine GPs) that applies under the RPGP with a mix of online and face-to-face activities. The thresholds for online training provide capacity for eligible GPs to seek grant support for face-to-face activities once COVID -19 restrictions have been lifted.

This is a time limited arrangement which will cease on 31 December 2020 unless otherwise advised by the Department of Health.

I may be able to attend some CPD training via videoconference. Will this be deemed as eligible training?

Until 31 December 2020, video-conference and other types of online training such as interactive webinars will also be eligible for RPGP grant support, however please talk to your college to determine if the activity you are interested in is eligible. All other CPD eligibility requirements outlined in the program guidelines must be met.

How much can I claim in the 2020-21 financial year for Component 1 (Procedural GPs practising in surgery, anaesthetics and/or obstetrics)?

Procedural GPs practising in surgery, anaesthetics and/or obstetrics can claim up to a total of \$20,000 for the financial year 2020-21 which may be a combination of online CPD (eligible until 31 December 2020) and standard RGP-eligible activities requiring a face-to-face component.

- Online CPD activities are limited to a maximum of 10 days at the rate of \$1,000 per day within the total annual cap of \$20,000 per year.

How much can I claim for Component 2 – GPs practising emergency medicine?

GPs practising emergency medicine can claim up to a total of \$6,000 for the financial year 2020-21 which may be a combination of online CPD (eligible until 31 December 2020) and standard RGP-eligible activities requiring a face-to-face component.

- Online CPD activities are limited to a maximum of 3 days at the rate of \$1,000 per day within the total annual cap of \$6,000 per year.

From 1 July 2020, emergency medicine GPs who are responsible for providing care in respect of emergency mental health services can claim an additional \$6,000 in 2020-21 for CPD in emergency mental health. This can be a combination of online CPD (eligible until 31 December 2020) and standard RGP-eligible activities requiring a face-to-face component.

Who will be eligible for the new emergency mental health CPD offered under the RGP?

GPs practising emergency medicine and who are responsible for providing emergency mental health services or crisis intervention, will be eligible to claim grants for attending eligible CPD activities in emergency mental health.

How do I claim the full amount available to me for emergency medicine / emergency mental health components if I claimed for online activities during COVID-19?

If you are an eligible participant, who claimed for online CPD at a rate of \$1000 per day, you may be able to rebalance your available funds when returning to face-to-face training (\$2000 per day) within the 2020-21 financial year. This applies if you have insufficient grants remaining to cover a full day of eligible CPD up to the maximum amounts for each component below:

- Emergency medicine - \$6,000
- Emergency mental health - \$6,000

For example, if you have expended \$3,000 undertaking 3 days of online emergency mental health CPD, and you wish to undertake a further 2 days of face-to-face CPD, you may be permitted to utilise \$1,000 of your allowance under the emergency medicine allocation to support this. It is best to talk to your GP College to ensure funds are rebalanced appropriately. These assessments will be made on a case by case basis.

Due to the number of days available for procedural skills training, it is not expected that this will be an issue when returning to procedural skills training.

If I claim for 10 days of online CPD activity during the current COVID-19 restrictions will I end up with less grant funding over the year than if I wait until the restrictions are lifted?

No, you will not be disadvantaged if you claim during the COVID-19 restrictions for CPD that is delivered online. During 2020-21, the annual allowances for each GP will be calculated on the maximum dollar value of grant support available (\$20,000/\$6,000), rather than setting a limit on the number of days of training that can be claimed. This means that if a procedural GP claimed

for 10 days of online CPD (at \$1,000 a day) he/she would still be eligible to undertake a further 5 days of face-to-face CPD at the standard rate of \$2,000 a day.

I completed online CPD activities in April 2020, can I claim for these?

While you are unable to lodge a claim for online CPD activities until 1 July 2020, CPD activities undertaken since the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic (11 March 2020) can be considered retrospectively for RGP grant support at the rate of \$1,000 per day if those activities meet the required eligibility criteria.

Do I need to re-enrol in the program after 1 July 2020, if I am already enrolled?

No, existing participants do not need to re-enrol after the changes come into effect. You can change the College that you are enrolled with for the RGP, however you can only be registered with one College at a time.

I am a Locum relief GP, can I still access the RGP during COVID-19?

The Government recognises that locums play an important role in delivering continuity of healthcare in rural and remote communities. Locums who meet the RGP eligibility requirements and deliver 28 days of locum services per year in rural and remote communities are eligible to access grant support for CPD activities delivered online.

How long will these additional flexibilities be in place?

At this stage the additional flexibilities outlined in the COVID-19 addendum will be in place until 31 December 2020. If required, the Department of Health will consider extending these provisions if current social distancing and movement restrictions continue to impact on participants' capacity to access face-to-face CPD.

Can I still access historical information on HPOS, the Services Australia payment system, after 1 July 2020?

The utilisation of HPOS for the RGP will cease from 1 July 2020. If you accessed your statements in the past electronically, you will be able to continue to access HPOS for this information as payment advices sent to the HPOS mail centre will remain and still be available to you. If you have been receiving this information via traditional postage, a request will need to be made to Services Australia to obtain this information and a cost may be incurred for this service.

At the cessation of Services Australia's processing of payments from 1 July 2020, the Colleges and the Department of Health will have limited access to historical information. From 1 July 2020 the Colleges will be responsible for processing payments as well as providing payment advice to eligible participants.