MAKE SOUTH AUSTRALIA A DESTINATION OF CHOICE FOR OVERSEAS-TRAINED DOCTORS

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The Australian Medical Association in South Australia (AMA SA), backed by a broad coalition of cultural medical groups, is calling on all sides of politics to commit to making South Australia a destination of choice for overseas trained doctors, warning that health workforce shortages will worsen without urgent reform.

International medical graduates (IMGs) make up roughly half of South Australia's clinical workforce, yet AMA SA President Associate Professor Peter Subramaniam says many confront unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to taking up positions and inadequate professional and social support after they arrive.

'Overseas trained doctors are the backbone of our health system,' A/Prof Subramaniam says. 'Without them, our hospitals would grind to a halt and the number of GPs would be halved.

'Despite their vital contributions – and the wealth of knowledge and experience they bring – many are forced to battle outdated and onerous red tape, and a lack of structured support that leaves some feeling completely alone.

'If South Australia wants to compete globally for medical talent, it must genuinely support doctors to build their lives and their careers here.

'With less than two weeks until the state election, we're calling on all parties to commit to additional support for this group of doctors, and in turn support a sustainable health workforce and the communities so reliant on it.'

A/Prof Subramaniam says AMA SA regularly hears from overseas-trained doctors who wait months for registration approvals, even as communities cry out for more doctors.

'Bureaucratic delays and administrative duplication are costing communities access to timely medical care,' A/Prof Subramaniam says.

'The consequences are being felt most acutely in regional and rural communities, which are already grappling with persistent workforce shortages. For some patients, it's the difference between having a local GP or travelling hours for treatment.'

AMA SA is calling on all parties contesting the election to commit to practical, deliverable reforms, including:

- Cutting registration red tape and removing administrative duplication in recruiting and securing IMGs for appointments in South Australia
- Developing and implementing relocation programs, including social and cultural supports, especially in regional areas
- Investing in GP training grants
- Supporting a streamlined and nationally consistent process for IMGs to achieve registration

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‘To be clear, this is not about watering down standards,’ A/Prof Subramaniam says. ‘Anyone who wants to work in Australia – whether trained here or overseas – must meet the same rigorous standards Australians rightly expect.

‘What AMA SA is calling for are common-sense, achievable steps to support doctors who are trained to Australian standards and want to live and work here.’

AMA SA’s proposals are backed by the South Australian Indian Medical Association (SAIMA), Australian Chinese Medical Association of South Australia (ACMA SA), the Pakistani Medical Association of South Australia (PMASA), the Bangladeshi Medical Society of South Australia (BAMSSA), the South Australian Sri Lankan Doctors Association (SASDA), and the African Australian Heart Health Initiative (AAHHI).

Quotes attributable to SAIMA President Dr Jai Krishnan

Doctors of Indian and South Asian descent represent a significant proportion of South Australia’s IMG workforce. Their contribution spans hospitals, general practice and regional services, where many communities rely on them for essential care.

Reducing barriers and supporting overseas-trained doctors to settle and build their careers in South Australia will strengthen the health system and help ensure patients – in metropolitan and regional areas – continue to receive timely access to high-quality medical care.

Quotes attributable to SASDA President Dr Lalith Gamage

IMGs strengthen the medical workforce. Their diverse clinical backgrounds and cultural perspectives also improve communication with patients and support higher-quality care.

Despite their contribution, IMGs face significant barriers, including under-recognition of their skills, a lack of clear pathways to identify highly qualified doctors, requirements to repeat exams or undertake additional training, geographic restrictions, and high examination costs.

These challenges create financial and career pressures for IMGs and delay their ability to contribute fully to Australia’s healthcare workforce.

Quotes attributable to BAMSSA President Dr Nusrat Nadia

Overseas-trained doctors from Bangladesh have been serving in Australia and meeting the required standards of practice for many years.

Increased support and reduced red tape will enable more doctors to join the workforce, strengthening South Australia’s healthcare system.

Quotes attributable to PMASA President Dr Abdullah Rana

The contribution of IMGs must be recognised and valued. South Australia lacks adequate pathways to identify, integrate and retain overseas-trained doctors.

PMASA urges all parties to commit to forming a working group to identify and remove red tape, improving the sustainability of the medical workforce in this state.

Quotes Attributable to ACMA SA President Dr Stephanie Vuong

There is no doubt that Australia faces a shortage of GPs and other specialists in rural and regional areas, and ACMA supports AMA SA’s initiative to pave the way for more overseas-trained doctors.

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Additional measures are needed to prevent the urban clustering of IMGs and to ensure Australian graduates are also appropriately incentivised to work in rural and regional communities.

Quotes attributable to AAHHI Chair Dr Chukwudiebube (Chuks) Ajaero

Overseas-trained doctors of African origin contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of the Australian community, including those living in rural and remote areas.

Eliminating registration red tape and improving relocation and retention incentives would deliver clear benefits to both doctors and communities.

For interview requests, please contact media manager Ben Terry on 0478 847 604.

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