



## POSITION STATEMENT

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### Internationally qualified pharmacists

#### Introduction

Pharmacists are essential members of the health workforce, contributing to the health of Australians by providing medication management and primary health care. Community pharmacies are trusted, accessible health environments visited by over a million Australians every day.

To deliver these health services, Australia requires a suitably qualified, trained and registered pharmacist workforce, which is equitably distributed and addresses areas of need.

Australian universities have increased the number of pharmacy students educated each year, however the current pharmacy workforce requires more registered and practising pharmacists to serve Australia's growing population, respond to the chronic health conditions of an aging population, deliver a broader scope of primary health services, and to practice in areas of low health service coverage.

Until an equilibrium is reached between the needs of the workforce, the number of practicing pharmacists and graduates trained by Australian universities, it will be necessary to supplement the Australian pharmacy workforce in the short-term with internationally qualified pharmacists (IQPs).

#### Position

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia supports the registration of internationally qualified pharmacists as a short-term contribution to Australia's pharmacy workforce. IQPs can assist in supplementing the locally trained pharmacist workforce, particularly in locations where it is difficult for pharmacies to recruit, attract or retain employee pharmacists. IQPs can also bring valuable skills and experience gained in their country of origin, such as experience as prescribers or delivering professional pharmacy services, that strengthens the Australian workforce.

The short-term recruitment of IQPs is not a substitute for locally educated and trained pharmacists. Australia should educate and train sufficient pharmacists to meet Australia's pharmacy workforce requirements in the long term.

The requirements for assessment of IQPs qualifications are set by the Pharmacy Board of Australia, and are administered by the Australian Pharmacy Council. IQPs should only be allowed to practice in Australia after appropriate verification of qualifications, demonstration of English-language proficiency, assessment of practice competency and a period of supervised practice.

All internationally qualified health professionals, including pharmacists, require orientation to Australian pharmacy practice on arrival, and support in the first years of practice in Australia. See Appendix.

Internationally qualified pharmacists are entitled to working conditions that are equivalent to similarly qualified Australian pharmacists practising in comparable locations. They must not be exploited by offering lower employment entitlements or lesser working conditions than local pharmacists.

Employment of internationally qualified pharmacists should not be considered as standard practice to staff rural and remote pharmacies. Such locations can be professionally and socially challenging environments. Shortages of pharmacists in rural Australia should be addressed through robust incentives and support mechanisms to encourage locally trained pharmacists to practice in these communities.

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#### National Secretariat



## The Guild calls for:

- Coordination and streamlining of pathways to registration for internationally qualified pharmacists.
- Simplification of visa categories.
- Consistency of visa eligibility and sponsorship arrangements between the Commonwealth, the states and territories.
- Greater funding and support for pharmacies and their workforce practising in rural and remote Australia (MMM 3-7).
- Internationally qualified pharmacists to be required to live and practice in regional, rural or remote communities for four (4) years after arrival in Australia. This would discourage IQPs from immediately moving to major capital cities, in particular Melbourne and Sydney, and potentially contributing to oversupply in those markets.
- Pharmacists to be retained on the Short-term Skilled Occupation List (STSOL). This will serve to smooth out cyclical 'peaks and troughs' that result from the removal and addition of pharmacists to this list.
- Information about registration pathways and required periods of supervised practice should be clear and readily available from the Australian Pharmacy Council and Pharmacy Board of Australia websites.
- The Australian Government to regulate the under or over supply of pharmacists by increasing or decreasing the number of visas granted to IQPs in response to robust workforce analysis, monitoring and forecasting within a National Pharmacist Workforce Strategy.

## Definitions and terminology

An **internationally qualified pharmacist** is a pharmacist who has completed their primary pharmacy degree and has obtained registration as a pharmacist in a country other than Australia or New Zealand.

The Guild prefers the term "internationally qualified pharmacist". Alternative terms include "overseas trained pharmacist", "internationally trained pharmacist" and "international pharmacy graduate".

## Related Policies

none

## Authority

### Reviewed

Workplace Relations Committee – July 2023

Practice, Policy and Regulatory Sub-Committee – October 2023

### Endorsed

National Council – December 2023

## Appendix: Support that should be available for internationally qualified pharmacists

### Orientation

Orientation training<sup>1</sup> for internationally qualified pharmacists should cover:

- The Australian health system and processes;
- Australian acronyms and colloquialisms;
- Cultural understanding of First Nations people, other Australians and people from other international backgrounds;
- Their rights and obligations;
- Medical ethics and patient rights;
- Clinical and practice resources; and
- Health services and contacts in their local community.

### Preparation for rural practice

All pharmacists who practice in rural or remote communities, whether locally trained or internationally qualified, should be adequately prepared and supported for rural life and practice. Including in areas of:

- Safety in rural Australia;
- Orientation to local socioeconomic factors that influence health;
- Connections with other local and regional health providers and agencies;
- Practice isolation; and
- Local links and resources for professional development.

### Ongoing support

IQPs should be supported in aspects of pharmacy practice and Australian culture during their first years of registration in Australia. This support should extend beyond any initial orientation training and mandated period of supervised practice. Support may be provided by employers, colleagues, government agencies, Primary Health Networks, local health services, professional bodies, university departments of rural health, local universities, or other sources.

Pharmacy knowledge and practice skills of IQPs can be highly variable, and language competency may not be as high as native-English speakers, especially understanding of Australian idioms and colloquialisms.

Further to any orientation training and supervised practice, IQPs should be encouraged and supported to develop and refine core practice skills (e.g. communication), and develop any missing capabilities (e.g. vaccination, medication review, or professional program delivery).

To support their professional development, IQPs on temporary visas who work in eligible rural locations should have the same access to Rural Support Programs<sup>2</sup> as Australian citizens and permanent residents.

Pharmacies in eligible rural locations that employ IQPs should have access to Rural Support Programs<sup>3</sup> when supervising the practice of an IQP, similar to the support provided to supervising an Australian-trained pharmacy intern.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Australasian College of Pharmacy offers a *Career Preparedness for Australian Community Pharmacy* course <https://www.acp.edu.au/education/short-courses/career-preparedness-course/>

<sup>2</sup> Such as the [Rural Intern Training Allowance](#) and [Rural Continuing Professional Education Allowance](#).

<sup>3</sup> Such as the [Intern Incentive Allowance for Rural Pharmacies](#).