



14 September 2015

Ms Penny Shakespeare  
First Assistant Secretary  
Health Workforce Division  
Department of Health  
GPO Box 9848  
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Via email: [david.whelan@health.gov.au](mailto:david.whelan@health.gov.au)

Dear Ms Shakespeare

### **Stakeholder consultation - Health Workforce Scholarship Programme**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the consultation on the *Health Workforce Scholarship Programme*.

As the largest professional and industrial organisation for nurses and midwives in Australia, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) represents a significant portion of the nursing and midwifery professions.

Preparatory education and on-going professional development are essential for nurses and midwives in the provision of safe, competent care. This is recognised by Government in the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's *Continuing professional development registration standard* – which includes minimum requirements for continuing professional development (CPD) for registration as a nurse or midwife. The Government also has a safety and quality agenda, implemented through the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's Safety and Quality Framework, which refers to continuing education of health professionals and keeping up-to-date with research and evidence-based care practices.

It is the position of the ANMF that employers, including governments at all levels, benefit from the continuing professional development of nurses and midwives. There is then an obligation for them to contribute financially, such as through awarding scholarships, to the cost of these activities.

With a membership of over 249,000 nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, our members are employed across all urban, rural and remote locations in both the public and private health and aged care sectors. The ANMF, therefore, has a keen interest in the scholarships programme and the continuing access by nurses and midwives to Government support for education opportunities, via scholarships funding. In addition, we consider it essential there is equity in access to, and funding support, across geographical areas, in order for nurses and midwives to meet their regulatory and safe practice requirements.

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#### **ANMF Journals**

**Australian Nursing and  
Midwifery Journal**

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**Australian Journal of  
Advanced Nursing**

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ABN 41 816 898 298

We offer the following comments for consideration in response to the Stakeholder consultation document.

*Scholarship prioritisation:*

- Funding should continue for nursing and midwifery scholarships: undergraduate, continuing professional development (CPD), postgraduate (including nurse practitioners and eligible midwives), re-entry, and, clinical placements where required in a rural or remote setting.
- Priority areas: there needs to be flexibility built into the scholarship programme so that priority areas can be reviewed at least annually. Priorities may vary depending on areas of need identified by such means as population health needs analysis, and nursing and midwifery workforce data derived through the annual labour force surveys undertaken at time of renewal of registration.
- Notice should be taken of the former Health Workforce Australia's projections on nursing and midwifery workforce shortfalls, which demonstrated the best scenario for reducing the future shortfall for nursing was retention. An incentive for staying in the workforce is supported education opportunities, for example through scholarship funding.
- As an equity issue, and to meet population health and aged care needs, scholarship funding requires to be proportional across the health care disciplines. This would require there to be a larger number of nursing and midwifery scholarships, which would address the current oversubscription issue for these professions.
- Nurses and midwives in rural and remote areas incur additional expenses to tutorial costs, in travel and, often times, accommodation requirements.

*Return of service (ROS) obligation:*

- The ANMF has concerns relating to a return of service obligation for nursing and midwifery scholarship recipients which includes difficulties inherent in a cohort of health professionals who are primarily female and with a high percentage within child bearing and rearing years. This creates hardship if there is a requirement to relocate from their usual place of abode, to a rural placement to complete ROS obligation requirements, even for a one year period.
- Consideration must be given to the amount of scholarship funding for which a ROS obligation would be required. The current scholarships for nurses and midwives include relatively small amounts for CPD activities such as conference attendance, to learn of research and innovative practice. Clearly this funding should not attract ROS obligations.
- The *Australian Government Health Workforce Programs Review 2013* found inconsistencies with the values of scholarships across health professional disciplines. Evidence would need to be provided to justify the value of nursing and midwifery scholarships requiring a ROS obligation.

The ANMF appreciates the opportunity to have participated in the stakeholder discussion forums and to be able to make written submission on the Stakeholder consultation document: *Health Workforce Scholarship Programme*.

Please do not hesitate to contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, ANMF Federal Office, Melbourne on 03 96028500 or [julianne@anmf.org.au](mailto:julianne@anmf.org.au) should you wish to discuss this submission.

Yours sincerely



**Lee Thomas**  
Federal Secretary