



AOA
AUSTRALIAN
ORTHOPAEDIC
ASSOCIATION

Further consultation needed for specialist registration changes

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The Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA), the peak professional body for orthopaedic surgeons in Australia, is urging Australia's Health Ministers to carefully balance the need for immediate solutions while maintaining high orthopaedic standards of care in order to address rural workforce shortages.

With 29% of Australians currently residing in rural and regional areas, the disparity in access to orthopaedic surgical care remains significant. Currently, only 20% of surgeons practice outside metropolitan centres, leaving many communities underserved.

AOA President Dr Scott Fletcher said, "Australians in rural and regional areas deserve high-quality and equitable orthopaedic and musculoskeletal care. Addressing this challenge requires thoughtful and collaborative solutions that not only meet immediate needs but also ensure long-term sustainability and safety.

"We acknowledge that specialist international medical graduates (SIMGs) play a vital role in addressing workforce gaps. However, we must ensure that SIMGs are supported with proper oversight and supervision. This is essential to maintaining high standards of care and avoiding unintended consequences, such as creating inequities in the workforce or compromising patient outcomes."

A recent study by Monash Rural Health highlights the complexity of ensuring equitable surgical care for the 7 million Australians living in rural areas. The study recommends targeted strategies in recruitment, training, and retention, including restructuring training programs to better align with the needs of rural communities.

"Simplifying SIMG pathways must be approached cautiously and with the necessary stakeholder consultation. Emphasis must be given to a sustainable and collaborative approach, which includes the increased training opportunities for Australian graduates and robust support for SIMGs, is essential for upholding the integrity of our healthcare system," added Dr Fletcher.

AOA, along with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and other medical specialties, is calling for further consultation to develop a cohesive and sustainable plan.

"Collaborative engagement is crucial to addressing rural workforce shortages while safeguarding the integrity of Australia's healthcare system. By working together, we can create a future where all Australians – regardless of location – have access to the same high standard of surgical care," Dr Fletcher said.

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About the Australian Orthopaedic Association

The Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA) is the peak professional body for orthopaedic surgeons in Australia. AOA provides high quality specialist education, training and continuing professional development. AOA is committed to ensuring the highest possible standard of orthopaedic care and is the leading authority in the provision of orthopaedic information to the community. AOA actively supports scientific research and orthopaedic humanitarian initiatives in Australia and overseas.

