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Our home-grown new doctors have never been more important

Students exiting medical schools across Australia continue to demonstrate their commitment to becoming the doctors that our communities need, with data revealing their interest in a future career working outside capital cities and involving Indigenous health, teaching, and research.

Data from the [Medical Schools Outcomes Database \(MSOD\) National Data Report 2020](#) shows nearly 35% of responding 2019 graduates expressed a preference for a future career working outside of a capital city – similar to the proportion of the general population living in these regions¹. There has also been a 10% increase over the last 5 years of graduates wanting Indigenous health to be part of their future career, with 47% graduates holding this view. There continues to be very high proportions looking to be involved in the teaching of future doctors (86%), and in research (63%).

The MSOD is an in-depth survey that has been conducted by Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand each year since 2005, which now has data from over 36,000 students on a range of aspects including their background, experiences during medical school, and future career interests and preferences.

“The interest from over a third of our graduates in working outside a capital city demonstrates how important it is to support our home-grown doctors. The work of medical schools in selecting from, and training in and for regional and rural communities provides a good start. However, more is still needed for us to realise this potential and ensure our regional, rural and remote communities have access to the health care they need” said President of Medical Deans, Professor Richard Murray.

“Continuing to train our doctors in the city and hoping they will ‘trickle-out’ to the regions as GPs and consultant specialists has been of limited value. What is needed is a joined-up approach across the stages of medical training with all stakeholders working together.”

“We have the opportunity to leverage the long-term investment government has made into regional teaching infrastructure, and accelerate reforms so regions have a greater say in training those doctors who could stay and work in their towns” Professor Murray reiterated.

Professor Murray said the growing interest in Indigenous health was heartening to see.

“Medical schools are continually working to better embed education on Indigenous health across their curricula, and ensure that all students have a solid start to their lifelong journey of practising culturally safe care and playing their part in stamping out racism in the health system and in society. Whilst we still have a long way to go, this data indicates that we are making good progress” he said.

Professor Murray reiterated the importance of growing the clinician-researcher workforce.

“This MSOD data shows the graduates’ interest in research is there,” said Professor Murray. “We are keen to work with government and other stakeholders to develop an integrated training pathway to help reverse this decline and ensure we have the workforce needed to continue Australia and New Zealand’s strong, global research performance”.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, ‘National census’, viewed 17/08/2020
<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2071.02016?OpenDocument>

Further details of the survey reveal that:

- 5% of graduates have children – this figure has remained consistent.
- The proportion relying on family support during their studies continues to gradually increase.
- Students who belonged to a university [rural health club](#)² were 3.1 times more likely to express a preference for a future career working outside a capital city.
- Over 26% of students from a non-rural background state a preference for a future practice outside a capital city; 10% express a preference to work in a regional, rural or remote area.
- General Practice as a preferred specialty moved up to being ranked second (from third last year), however the proportion expressing this preference is still falling.
- The interest in Anaesthesia continues to grow – it is the specialty that has had the largest increase over the previous 5 years, from 8.1 per cent in 2015 to 11 per cent in 2019.
- The “atmosphere/culture typical of the discipline” remains the main factor that influences students’ preferred future specialty.
- Overall levels of satisfaction with their medical school’s program and in their preparation for internship remains high, however there was a drop in the proportion satisfied or very satisfied, and an increase of those dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

“The MSOD is a unique, national source of comprehensive, longitudinal data that aren’t otherwise available,” said Medical Deans CEO, Ms Helen Craig.

“Better understanding our graduates – their backgrounds, experiences and aspirations – is crucial for those involved in medical education and in shaping health workforce policies,” Ms Craig added.

“We greatly value the commitment of our graduates in taking the time to share their feedback. We look forward to working with government and our colleagues across the training continuum to ensure their voice is listened to and for this data to contribute to effective policies and programs for Australia and New Zealand to have the future doctor workforce our communities need.”

The 2020 Medical Schools Outcomes Database Report can be accessed [here](#).

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Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand Inc. (Medical Deans) is the peak body representing professional entry-level medical education, training and research in Australia and New Zealand. The organisation’s membership comprises the Deans of Australia’s 21 medical schools and the two New Zealand schools. As well as having an extensive representative and advocacy role in the advancement of health and education, Medical Deans auspice and manage a number of projects in relation to medical education and the medical workforce, including the Medical Schools Outcomes Database (MSOD), Indigenous health and the LIME Network, graduate competencies and benchmarking, student health, research, and social accountability.

² Rural Health Clubs are University groups that provide medical, nursing and allied health students with the opportunity to learn more about rural lifestyle and practice <https://www.nrhn.org.au/>