Rural Allied Health Scholarship Programs

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health

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The Australian Government currently funds two scholarship programs for allied health and oral health professionals which aim to increase and support the rural and remote health professional workforce.

It is important to recognise the importance of allied health professional services particularly in respect to emergent priorities such as:

- the aging population;
- the chronic disease epidemic;
- illness prevention and health promotion;
- primary health care;
- the effectiveness of health outcomes when delivered by multidisciplinary teams.

Access to allied health and dental services in the bush is affected by the same issues that impact on the medical workforce.

Australian Rural and Remote Health Professional Scholarship [ARRHPS] Scheme

SARRAH seeks an expansion of the postgraduate scholarship fund.

- ***Increase distribution funds to a minimum of $1,000,000 annually***
- ***Increase administration funds to reflect increases in wages, administration costs and personnel requirements.***
  - ***Require funding for Administration Officer (1.0 FTE), Administration Assistant (0.5 FTE), Program Manager (0.2 FTE) and Financial manager (0.3 FTE),***
  - ***IT and Communication costs including marketing strategy,***
  - ***Travel, training and support for the activity of the scholarship's Advisory and Selection Committee (relating to scholarship application and allocation processes) and for scholarship staff,***
  - ***Office and administration costs.***
  - ***TOTAL: $250,000 indexed annually at 5%***

About the scholarship scheme

1. Operates on a triennial funding cycle, with current funding contract lapsing 30th June 2008.
2. Provides funding for continuing professional development activities including: individual clinical placements (enhancing, maintaining and increasing clinical skills), short courses, conferences and formal postgraduate courses.

3. Target group - qualified health professionals who live and provide services in rural and remote Australia.
4. Eligible professions:
   a) allied health professions – therapy and diagnostic,
   b) oral health professions,
   c) public health professions,
   d) Aboriginal Health Workers with a minimum of a Cert III qualification.
5. Funding:
   a) $600,000 available per annum – core dollar amount has been at this level since 2002
   b) Additional one off funding (from DoHA residual funds):
      i) 2006 - $135,000 scholarships distribution & $15,000 administration.
      ii) 2007 - $450,000 scholarship distribution & $50,000 administration.
   c) Core administration money has not increased since 2002-2003 financial year - $100,000 per annum.
      i) Wages and administration costs (rent, marketing costs, insurances, general office expenses) have increased.
      ii) Complexity of administration increases:
         - 5 rounds of scholars requiring processing and payments, 6th round of application and allocations currently open.
         - Some scholars complete within few weeks (conference, short courses).
         - Those undertaking formal postgraduate education continue over 2-6 years.
      iii) Current level of administration funding only permits employment of one full time staff member, limited availability of funds for administration support (other staff) and marketing/promotion of program.
6. Allocation:
   a) Advertised and allocated once a year – limited by availability of funds and administration money.
   b) Scholarships range from one off grants of a few hundred dollars to $24,000 over 6 years for a professional doctorate.
7. Applications:
   a) Between 200 and 300 per year;
   b) Total requests $2.7million in 2006.
8. Promotion:
   a) Advertised in a range of regional press and Indigenous publications (budget set at $8,000 per annum which does not allow for significant print advertising);
   b) Conferences and other allied health forums;
   c) Website;
   d) SARRAH, National Rural Health, Allied Health Professions of Australia networks, Professional Associations publications and networks, and websites.
9. Evaluation:
   a) Feedback from scholars consistently positive with regards to the assistance scholarship has provided in enabling them to access professional education – opportunities that they would otherwise not have been able to take.
   b) Scholars provide evaluation on continuing professional development activity and its impact on their practise and their ability to meet the needs of their community.
   c) A preliminary evaluation of the scheme was undertaken in 2005, after the program had been in operation for two years, prior to the refunding of the scheme for a further 3 year period.

d) The scheme will again undergo an evaluation in 2008. It is anticipated that the evaluation will demonstrate trends with regards to the impact of the scholarship scheme on retention rates.

Rural Allied Health Undergraduate Scholarship [RAHUS] Scheme

SARRAH seeks increased funding for the RAHUS program to provide parity

- ***Raise the number of scholarships from current maximum of 195 to equal the medical scholarship scheme – 550 scholarships in total.***
- ***Current expenditure $1,950,000, Requested expenditure $5,500,000 per annum phased in over the next three year cycle of funding.***
  - ***Provide an additional 120 new scholarships in 2009, 120 new scholarships in 2010 and 115 new scholarships in 2011.***
- ***Administration funding to match the complexity of the scheme and the number of scholars. Currently employ one full time and one part time administration staff.***
  - ***Personnel - Administration Officer (1 FTE), Administration Assistant (1.5 FTE), Financial Manager (0.3 FTE), Program Manager (0.2 FTE)***
  - ***Mentoring program for scholars - $200 per scholarship 550 scholarships will require $110,000***
  - ***IT and communications including a marketing strategy to target students in years 10, 11 and 12 in rural schools and universities. The promotional material to include information relating to clinical skills and competencies of the different allied health professions including school subject requirements.***
  - ***Office and administration costs***
  - ***Committee and staff support, travel and training.***
  - ***TOTAL: $360,000 indexed annually at 5%***

In considering the funding for allied health and oral health entry level scholarships it is important to recognise that majority of eligible courses are either 4 or 5 year duration. With a three year funding cycle for the scholarship program, there will be limited numbers of scholarships available in the fourth and fifth year of funding.

- Current forward projections if no new funding for scholarships is received (i.e. scholarship numbers are maintained at current level of 195 per year):
  - if no new scholarships available in 2009 will be limited by scholars who are completing at the end of 2008.
  - 2008 allocations not yet completed.
  - Forward projections on 2006/2007 allocations indicate the availability of 34 scholarships in 2009.

It is also important to recognise that unlike the medical and nursing undergraduate scholarship schemes where a single discipline is involved – this scholarship program is distributed across 16 different disciplines. The size of the workforce supported is on a par with that of the medical workforce.

About the scholarship scheme

1. Operates on a triennial funding cycle, with current funding contract lapsing 30th June 2008.
2. Entry level (undergraduate and entry level graduate accredited/approved allied health and oral health courses).
3. Target group - based on rural origin and financial need.
4. Eligible professions:

a) Allied Health (14 disciplines)

Aboriginal Health Work	Audiology	Chiropractic	Dietetics
Exercise Physiology	Medical Radiation Science Medical Imaging, Radiation Therapy, Nuclear Medicine	Occupational Therapy	Optometry
Osteopathy	Physiotherapy	Podiatry	Psychology
Social Work	Speech Pathology		

b) Oral Health (2 disciplines)

Dentistry	Oral Health

5. Allocation:
   a) Provides $10,000 per year for the duration of the scholarship to assist in the travel, accommodation and other expenses relating to having to leave home to study.
   b) 65 new scholarships allocated 2006 & 2007.
   c) A further 65 new scholarships available for 2008
6. Applications:
   a) 905 applications in 2006,
   b) Over 700 applications in 2007.
7. Requirements:
   a) Participate in Rural Allied Health Mentor Program,
   b) Develop learning plan,
   c) Belong to University Rural Health Club.
8. Promotion:
   a) Advertised in a range of regional press and Indigenous publications (budget set at $25,,000 per annum);
   b) National Rural Health Network and Rural Health Clubs;
   c) Universities and schools direct;
   d) Conferences and other allied health forums;
   e) Website;
   f) SARRAH, National Rural Health, Allied Health Professions of Australia networks, Professional Associations publications and networks, and websites.
   g) SARRAH seeks funding to develop a CD-ROM / web based resource material to:
      i) Promote the allied health disciplines as a career including information about what the professions do and to assist in course selection at school.
      ii) Promote the scholarships giving information about eligibility and selection criterion.
      iii) Provide resource material for presentation and promotion for use by career officers at schools and universities and others working to promote the scheme e.g. Rural Health Clubs.
9. Evaluation and Research
   a) The scholarship will undergo its first evaluation in early 2008. This will provide data in respect to processes involved in the administration of the scheme and baseline data on impact of the program. Current data has shown that those who have been offered a scholarship have:
      i) Had to consider the impact of scholarship funds on their financial circumstances (e.g. the scholarship funds impacts on allowances such as Disability Pension and Youth Allowance paid by Centrelink. One scholarship was declined because the recipient would lose substantial payments from her Disability Pension if she had accepted.

ii) There has been no dropping out of university courses by those holding scholarships. Students who have failed subjects in one year and have to repeat a year have their scholarship suspended for that time. The scholarship is reactivated once the student progresses again.

iii) Longer term impact evaluation of the scholarship program is planned with tracking of scholarship holders through their career pathways following graduation at 2 years, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years etc.