

Bonded schemes: what do allied students think?

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Background

Since their inception, debate has surrounded the utility and fairness of the Bonded Medical Place (BMP) and Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship (MRBS) schemes. These schemes provide a Commonwealth Supported Place to study medicine, with or without a monetary scholarship, in exchange for a 'return of service' obligation in an RA2-5 area or district of workforce shortage. A recent independent review recommended the abolition of at least one of these schemes with funding redirected towards scholarships for students of allied health professions. Much of the debate to date has been anecdotal and based on limited data.

Aims

Research questions included:

- Do health students support or oppose bonded schemes?
- How does the level of support vary between different student health discipline groups?
- Do bonded students intend to complete their return of service?

Method

Over 9,000 allied health, nursing and medical student members of the National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) at universities across Australia were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey.

Results

- 920 responses were received:
- 267 non-medicine (nursing and allied health) students
- 307 bonded medical students
- 316 non-bonded medical students

60 out of the 267 responses from Allied health students did not provide a response for whether they supported schemes similar to BMP/MRBS for Allied health students and were thus excluded, leaving the 207 allied health students.

Of 207 allied-health students, 72% supported similar schemes, 27.5% were undecided and 0.05% were opposed to similar schemes for non-medical health disciplines.

Conclusion

Amongst NRHSN members, there is broad support for bonded schemes as a means of addressing workforce shortages. The majority of bonded medical students intend to complete their return of service obligations. From this research there is reason to consider bonded schemes for allied health and nursing students too as a means of addressing workforce shortages.