



10 September 2024

Mr Blair Comley PSM  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Aged Care  
GPO Box 9848  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Comley

***Re: Specialist Training Program Funding for Dermatology Registrar in Regional Post***

Access to dermatology services is severely limited in rural and regional areas due to a shortage of dermatologists and clinics, resulting in longer wait times for appointments, difficulty accessing appropriate specialists and a lack of preventative and early intervention care.

The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) acknowledges that fewer than 10% of dermatologists currently base their practice outside of Australia's capital cities, which results in people living in regional, rural and remote areas having less access to high quality specialist dermatological services, despite high levels of need.

WPRS and Professor Werner Sinclair have offered specialist dermatology services in regional Victoria and South Australia since 2017 and have offered privately-funded training positions for registrars and international medical graduates. Our primary catchment areas are Warrnambool, Hamilton and Mount Gambier, but the service reaches a population of approximately 250,000 across MM2 – MM5 locations.

Regional dermatology presents unique challenges with large patient loads and a broad clinical scope. The large distances travelled patients often necessitates unplanned procedures on the same day and unique treatment strategies not seen in metropolitan practice.

In 2021 we were granted conditional accreditation by the ACD to take an international medical graduate through the Specialist Recognition Assessment Pathway (SRAP). Our first trainee on this pathway, Dr Sara Sabourirad, successfully completed her required period of 12 months upskilling under the supervision of Professor Sinclair and subsequently joined WPRS as a consultant specialist dermatologist after being admitted as a Fellow.

Since 2021, we have also partnered with the Skin Health Institute and The Alfred to offer regional outreach placements for their registrars under the supervision of Prof Sinclair. These have occurred on a rotational basis with trainees working in our Warrnambool and Hamilton clinics for a week at a time.

Regional outreach placements provide excellent opportunities for trainees to develop their skills and present opportunities to be exposed to a wider range of cultures and communities, but also present challenges associated with working away from major metropolitan centres. Outreach dermatologists generally need to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements, often during a weekend and can suffer greater levels of exhaustion. They are generally also away from family and support networks.

The impact is also felt by the trainee's 'home' clinic, who will be without the trainee for period of time, resulting in disruption to resourcing and scheduling. This very impact was felt by the Skin Health Institute and our outreach placements with their registrars was paused during 2024 due to lack of resources.

We received conditional accreditation for a further training position for 2024. This position is comprised of a six-month rotation by an Australian-trained dermatology registrar and a six-month rotation by an international medical graduate trainee under the SRAP. We anticipate that this position will receive full accreditation after the National Accreditation Committee's second review check in October 2024.

The creation of this position has allowed for continuity of our regional service, that would otherwise be impossible and has allowed for regional training opportunities without the downsides of outreach placements. Trainees can settle and integrate into the clinic and community and offer continuity of service.

Our positions have been privately-funded with the exception of Specialist Training Program (STP) funding for one six-month period.

We applied for the STP Reserve List again in 2024 and have been subsequently advised by the ACD that all STP funding is allocated through 2025. This message was communicated by email 02 August 2024 and subsequently confirmed in discussion with ACD on 05 September 2024.

WPRS offer one of only two accredited dermatology training positions in a regional setting (<https://www.dermcoll.edu.au/health-professionals/becoming-a-dermatologist/accreditation-training-positions/>). However, due to the significant costs involved in setup, employment and support of trainees, we are unable to continue privately funding training positions and require allocation of further STP funding.

**We request that the Department of Health and Aged Care compel the Australasian College of Dermatologists to reallocate STP funding from metropolitan to regional positions for 2025.** Without such funding, our regional training position will cease, causing significantly longer wait times for patients and a threat to the ongoing viability of the service as a whole, due to the burnout and fatigue faced by our consultant specialists.

**Additionally, it is critical for the Federal Government to invest more in specialist training.** The number of available training positions appear inadequate to address the clear under-resourcing in regional areas. Through training more specialists and integrating their training in the regional healthcare system, we will be able to alleviate patient wait times and get better health outcomes for the community.

Yours sincerely,



Christopher Kiroff  
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Professor Paul Kelly, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Aged Care  
The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care  
Dr Adriene Lee, President, Australasian College of Dermatologists  
Dr Haley Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian College of Dermatologists