



ANZCA
FPM

President and CEO

Australian and New Zealand
College of Anaesthetists

7 February 2024

The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Australian anaesthesia workforce snapshot

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM), is committed to setting the highest standards of clinical practice in the fields of anaesthesia, perioperative medicine and pain medicine. As one of the largest medical colleges in Australia, ANZCA is responsible for the postgraduate training programs of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians, in addition to promoting best practice and ongoing continuous improvement that contributes to a high-quality health system.

We know that following the pandemic, workforce is at the forefront for health authorities at the moment. ANZCA and many of our fellows have attended a number of jurisdictional health department summits over the past six months to help provide solutions to the international phenomenon of shortages in the medical workforce.

A significant driver is an increasing elective and planned workload, coupled with supply-side issues including reduced skilled migration during the pandemic and a trend for our fellows, trainees and specialist international medical graduates to have a more balanced lifestyle and work fewer hours (again, the pandemic appears to have acted as a catalyst to this trend).

ANZCA is not directly involved in the selection of trainees in Australia. Anaesthesia trainee selection is a regional and local training site process undertaken by employers, with these processes varying in each jurisdiction. Further, medical training pathways are long and complex, and determining specific workforce requirements is hampered by poor and conflicting data.

The National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021-2031 cites anaesthesia as a specialty in a growing oversupply, but the more recent "Independent Review of Overseas Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings" led by Ms Robyn Kruk, targets anaesthetists as a group in short supply. We are hopeful however that many of these difficulties in medical workforce planning will be addressed in the future as stakeholders, including ANZCA, work together with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to implement the National Medical Workforce data strategy.

Despite these challenges, we wish to reassure you that the college continues to train specialist anaesthetists in Australia at pre-pandemic levels. The enclosed Australian anaesthesia workforce snapshot shows that as at December 2023 there are:

- 1530 anaesthesia trainees in Australia – **an increase of 4.7 per cent compared with 12 months ago and 15.7 per cent compared with December 2019, prior to the pandemic.**
- 5514 fellows (specialist anaesthetists) in Australia – **an increase of 3.4 per cent compared with 12 months ago and 11.5 per cent compared with December 2019, prior to the pandemic.**

At the most recent sitting of final exams in November 2023, 104 trainees passed the exam, meaning they will be ready to join the workforce in the coming weeks. They will join the 146 trainees who passed an earlier sitting of the final exam in June 2023.

We also know there is a maldistribution of the specialist medical workforce in Australia. The college is committed to working with government and other stakeholders to improve health outcomes and access to services for Australians in our regional, rural and remote communities. We have also enclosed some information about our regional training pathways throughout Australia and recent highlights from [our regional and rural workforce strategy](#). The college recognises the important role of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's Specialist Training Program (STP) in supporting training outside of metropolitan areas.

Once again, we would like to take this opportunity to assure you the college is committed to continuing its work to address these issues and we thank you for your continued collaboration.

Yours sincerely



Dr Chris Cokis
President



Mr Nigel Fidgeon
Chief Executive Officer