

TITLE

Roadmap to Support International Medical Graduates for Satisfying Rural General Practice Careers: Summary Report

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to develop a national, evidence-informed roadmap of contextualised strategies to support international medical graduates (IMGs) to achieve satisfying, sustainable careers in rural general practice in Australia. The study addressed the absence of a coordinated national approach to supporting IMGs across the full pathway from migration to specialist qualification and long-term rural practice.

The objectives were to:

1. Identify what works, when and why, to support IMGs across different stages of the rural general practice pathway.
2. Describe contextualised strategies that promote IMG comfort, confidence, competence, belonging and bonding.
3. Develop and refine a roadmap through iterative consultation with IMGs and key rural general practice stakeholders.
4. Produce a practical framework to inform coordinated action across agencies, programs and communities.

METHODS (brief)

A realist evaluation design was used to understand how contextualised strategies interact with mechanisms to produce outcomes. The study was conducted between November 2024 and July 2025 and involved four phases: development of an initial roadmap informed by literature and policy; co-design of a draft roadmap with a project advisory group; refinement through interviews and focus groups with external stakeholders across IMG pathways; and confirmation through structured feedback. Participants included IMGs, supervisors, training organisations, policymakers and rural workforce leaders from across Australia. Data were analysed to identify context–intervention–mechanism–outcome patterns that informed the final roadmap.

RESULTS

The study generated a national roadmap identifying strategies required across three key stages of the IMG pathway.

Stage 1: Migrating and acclimatising

When IMGs arrive in Australia, centralised, accessible information about rural general practice careers, training pathways, regulatory systems and community life promotes comfort and empowerment. Early clarity reduces confusion, stress and poorly informed employment decisions.

Stage 2: Moving to new workplaces and communities

When IMGs transition into rural workplaces, supportive practices, quality supervision, skills-bridging opportunities and mechanisms to connect with other doctors, families and

communities promote confidence, competence and community belonging. Safe workplaces and fair employment arrangements were critical.

Stage 3: Training as a rural general practitioner

During specialist training, equitable, family-focused and capability-building training aligned to both IMG and community needs promotes professional belonging and bonding.

Recognition of IMG strengths and continuity of supervisory relationships were key contributors to satisfaction.

Across all stages, early intervention and continuity of supports were essential. Gaps at earlier stages often compounded later challenges, whereas layered, longitudinal supports increased the likelihood of IMGs becoming qualified, valued and settled rural general practitioners.

DISCUSSION: CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

This research provides the first national, theory-informed roadmap describing how to support IMGs into satisfying rural general practice careers. It advances the field by moving beyond siloed or stage-specific approaches to IMG support and instead articulating a whole-of-pathway perspective grounded in realist theory. The findings demonstrate that IMG satisfaction is not driven by isolated interventions but by coordinated, timely and contextualised strategies that address both professional and personal integration. The roadmap reframes IMG support as a shared system responsibility rather than an individual adjustment challenge.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The roadmap has significant implications for workforce policy, training systems and rural health service planning. It provides a practical framework to guide coordinated action across migration, regulation, training, supervision and community integration. Policymakers can use the roadmap to align reforms with longitudinal IMG needs, including those arising from expedited registration pathways. Training organisations and employers can apply the roadmap as a planning and benchmarking tool to identify gaps, reduce duplication and improve efficiency. Implementing the roadmap could strengthen IMG retention, reduce rural workforce instability and promote equity consistent with global ethical standards.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should test the implementation of the roadmap in practice, including its impact on IMG satisfaction, retention and patient outcomes. Economic evaluation of coordinated versus fragmented support models is warranted. Further work is also needed to clarify roles, responsibilities and resourcing for roadmap implementation, and to explore adaptation of the framework for other countries, specialties and underrepresented health workforce groups.