Guide to your career in general practice
‘The heart of general practice will always be our patients. Continuity of care is a privilege other medical specialists rarely get to enjoy.’

Welcome to the RACGP’s Guide to your career in general practice.

A day in the life of a GP is as diverse as it is rewarding. No two days are the same, and the variety of our work is one of the greatest appeals of the specialty. Every consultation is different, and every consultation is an opportunity to help someone take the next step to better health.

The heart of general practice will always be our patients. GPs are patients’ first point of care, and we’re passionate about the enduring relationships we build with our patients over a lifetime. Continuity of care is a privilege other medical specialists rarely get to enjoy.

This guide will tell you everything you need to know about the different paths to becoming a GP with the RACGP. You’ll find out which stream is right for you, what steps you’ll take in your early medical training, what being a GP in training is like and what your career in general practice could be.

The guide also outlines the opportunities you’ll have to maintain lifelong learning alongside your peers in the collegiate RACGP environment and continually develop throughout your general practice career, starting with advice on preparing for your Fellowship exams.

The RACGP and the general practice community will stand behind you as a constant source of support over the course of your career as a GP. We’ll make sure you’re equipped to become a confident, enthusiastic, independent GP, capable of working in big cities, regional centres or the most remote corners of Australia.

Dr Karen Price
RACGP President
Why did you choose general practice?

Nachaat says:
‘I chose general practice because I have a passion for helping others and seeing the benefit it brings to them. I enjoy creating bonds with patients and exploring different ways of helping others. General practice allows me to do so in a unique and fantastic way that not only benefits patients but also the GP in the way in which Fellowship is enhanced. Becoming a GP is as if you are specialised in all specialties, helping yourself and your family while also lending a helping hand to others who need it the most as a way of gratitude and giving back to the community.’

Dr Nachaat Wahba
RACGP registrar member

Ellie says:
‘I chose general practice because it allows me to work across multiple specialty areas, every single day. I’m passionate about women’s health, mental health, Aboriginal health and paediatrics. With general practice, I’m able to practice in each of these areas, among others. Additionally, I’m interested in the upstream drivers of population health. Public health is inextricably linked to the primary healthcare system, and working at the interface in general practice has provided me with valuable skills in both public health and clinical medicine.’

Dr Ellie Woodward
RACGP registrar member

Yung says:
‘General practice has enticed me since university; I was drawn to the idea of being able to treat patients of all ages in a holistic manner. The ability to do this in the setting of my own consultation room, where I can develop a lasting doctor–patient relationship with my patients, is something I find very rewarding. In addition, the flexibility in working hours and being able to incorporate a private-practice model in medicine was something that very few specialties offer.’

Dr Yung Chong Soon
RACGP registrar member

This guide is designed to:
• help clarify questions you may have about general practice as a specialty
• provide you with important information about what a career in general practice entails
• outline what options are available throughout your career
• map out the steps you need to take to become a GP.

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Become a GP

A day in the life of a GP is as diverse as it is rewarding. No two days are the same, and it is this variety that draws many to the specialty. Add to that the clinical challenges, opportunities to make a difference to your patients and their communities, a supportive and passionate collegial network and the relationships you will form with patients over a lifetime, and you’ve got a compelling case for general practice as an incredibly fulfilling career choice.
What is general practice?

General practice is the largest medical specialty in Australia and is the cornerstone of Australia’s healthcare system. General practice is a unique discipline of largely relationship-based specialist medical care providing person-centred, continuing, comprehensive and coordinated whole person healthcare to individuals and families in their community.

General practice is often the first port of call for a patient. GPs are trained to treat a range of medical conditions, focusing on the whole person. GPs also focus on preventive health and are best placed to provide advice on a variety of ways to remain healthy.

What does a GP do?

Working in general practice is different to working in a hospital and also is different to working in many other specialties. Working in the community as the first port of call, GPs often see the patient in the early stages of their illness when the problem is undifferentiated. Not knowing what the next patient might present with and dealing with undifferentiated problems is challenging, but it is also one of the most rewarding aspects of general practice. GPs also manage an enormous variety of different problems and conditions with a broad span of knowledge.

Being based in the community, the access to services and investigations can be different to in a hospital. GPs get to know what is available and how to help their patients access services; this requires knowledge of the individual patient, their circumstances and their community. Getting to know patients and offering ongoing, long-term continuity of care is a special privilege of general practice. Over time, GPs really get to know their patients and their lives; some GPs even support the birth of the child of someone who they cared for many years before.

Furthermore, GPs have an opportunity to practise preventive medicine. The chance to be proactive in helping patients maintain their health can also be very rewarding.

Why general practice?

Not only does general practice offer a great choice for clinical medicine, it has many positives as a career choice.

Variety and portability

A career in general practice allows you the opportunity to work in a wide variety of community settings, including the inner city, outer suburbia, regional towns, smaller rural communities, isolated rural settings and overseas. These community settings provide a range of opportunities to work with different patient groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or those with special needs like refugees, people experiencing homelessness and the elderly.

Specific interests

A career in general practice allows you to pursue many areas of specific interest. For example, if you have a clinical interest in diabetes, paediatrics or palliative care, you can choose to develop specific skills in that area either during your training or after attaining Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP) by undertaking further formal studies to expand on your skills.

Work-life balance

In comparison to many other medical specialties, general practice offers a wide variety of flexible working arrangements, including full-time, part-time, evenings and/or weekends, or short-term locum positions in different and interesting locations to suit your lifestyle.

Business ownership

General practice offers the unique and exciting opportunity to be your own boss by owning your own practice, which can offer career diversity, upskilling and autonomy. Practice ownership can be very rewarding financially, professionally and personally.

Characteristics and skill set of a GP

As general practice is largely a relationship-based specialist medical discipline, GPs possess a unique combination of characteristics and skills, including:

• an interest in people and holistic care. GPs understand that health, illness and disease are ultimately personal experiences – the principal role is to relieve personal disease in all its forms in the manner best suited to each individual.

Managing people in their community over time requires an understanding of the individual and their circumstances

• the ability to manage uncertainty. Not knowing what a patient is coming in for and managing them without a definite diagnosis can be challenging. Although GPs have support in this, they need to be able to manage the uncertainty that is both a challenge and a rewarding part of general practice

• a range of clinical skills and experience both diagnostic and therapeutic. GPs are skilled in managing uncertainty, undifferentiated illness and complexity. They are able to use best-practice evidence in the light of individual circumstances, and engage patients and families in understanding, planning and managing their health according to individual capacities for a diverse range of conditions

• good communication skills. In caring for the medical needs of the whole person, the GP functions as a physician, counsellor, advocate and agent of change for individuals, families and their communities. General practice services and skills are not limited by age, gender, body system, disease process or service site

• clinical independence. GPs are often working with the patient and making decisions one on one in their clinic. That said, they are not isolated; there is plenty of support in the work they do, whether that be in the middle of a large city or in a more remote rural area.

Specific interests

A career in general practice allows you to pursue many areas of specific interest. For example, if you have a clinical interest in diabetes, paediatrics or palliative care, you can choose to develop specific skills in that area either during your training or after attaining Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP) by undertaking further formal studies to expand on your skills.
General practice offers a diverse array of options allowing you to focus on your areas of interest or to tailor your career to suit your desired work-life balance. The following are some opportunities you may choose to explore during your RACGP general practice training and possibly expand on later in your career.

Clinical practices vary in size, site and structure. Some are private, while some are publicly funded; some are in cities and some are rural. Many GPs choose to run their own practice, but others work as employees or contractors. Some choose to work in more than one practice and some do locum work, while many combine clinical work with work in areas of special interest, such as dermatology or sports medicine. Lastly, some GPs might do sessions in hospitals or in non-clinical areas, such as administration, teaching or research. There are many options and possibilities.
General practice in rural and remote Australia

RACGP Rural is a faculty dedicated to rural and remote health. It’s Australia’s largest representative body of rural GPs.

With more than 20,000 members, including almost 10,000 GPs living and working in rural and remote Australia, RACGP Rural recognises the challenges specific to rural and remote areas and supports rural GPs and their communities through advocacy, research, education and policy development.

The unique characteristics of Australia’s rural areas offer diversity in complex health presentations and give you opportunities to expand your skills and take on a wide variety of clinical opportunities.

In many rural and remote areas across Australia, GPs with additional rural skills training (ARST) offer the only specialist medical services (such as emergency medicine, mental health, anaesthesia and obstetrics) available to their communities. Clinical opportunities for rural GPs can include hospital- and community-based work using a range of procedural and non-procedural skills; emergency response; after-hours services; outreach clinics; and population health initiatives.

RACGP Rural:
- champions the role of rural GPs and provides a strong voice to government and stakeholders to address the challenges of rural general practice
- maintains policy leadership to secure a sustainable rural health system
- delivers the Fellowship of Advanced Rural General Practice and Rural Generalist training to broaden patient access to safe, comprehensive healthcare
- delivers education activities to develop clinical skills and support lifelong learning
- administers the Rural Procedural Grants Program to provide financial assistance for education for rural and remote GPs
- provides support and guidance to assist medical students, junior doctors, registrars and GPs
- offers opportunities for networking, mentoring and professional development.


General practice research

Research in general practice is essential to improving patient health outcomes. It is important that clinical questions arising from general practice are addressed by research undertaken within the general practice setting. GPs can be involved in research at various levels. It is important for all GPs to understand how to access and apply research evidence to their clinical work. GPs can also actively participate in research in a number of ways, including recruiting patients for general practice research, being involved in research co-design, undertaking co-investigator roles and even leading research projects. Getting involved in supervised research early in your career lets you develop many valuable skills.

You will have many opportunities to get involved in research during your general practice training. You can experience academic life in a university general practice department or a rural clinical school or undertake your own research project during your training by applying for an academic post. Both the FRACGP and FARGP programs support academic post terms. This term can be completed either as an extended skills post or as optional additional training time, and it can be a stepping stone towards an academic career. You may have the option of counting the term towards a higher degree program (such as a PhD). Discuss this option with your university supervisor during your application process, if you are considering undertaking a PhD. Visit www.racgp.org.au/education/registrars/research/racgp-research/research-during-training for more information.

If you are not interested in an academic post or you are unsuccessful in your academic post application, you can still get involved in research projects by contacting your local university department of general practice or rural clinical school. You can also access opportunities for funding to conduct research through the RACGP Foundation. Visit https://foundation.racgp.org.au/grants for more information.

Options in general practice

Extended skills training

Extended skills training is a six-month, full-time-equivalent post that aims to deepen knowledge and skills and expand the scope of practice in particular areas relevant to primary medical care.

You will have many areas of study to choose from to complete your post, including aged care, palliative care, sports medicine, sexual health and skin cancer medicine. You can also extend your skills in academic general practice research.
Yagila Wadamba Support Program

Co-named by the Wurundjeri Council, Yagila Wadamba (meaning ‘learn to heal’) is an annual support program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars. The two-day workshop concentrates on exam performance and other key areas of general practice training. Participants are able to network with their peers in a friendly and welcoming environment while taking advantage of the opportunity to hear and learn from medical educators and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fellows. Attendees are supported to not only perform at their best in exams, but to thrive throughout their general practice training.


Growing Strong Award

Through the generous donation of RACGP member Dr Nathan Pinskier and Mrs Susan Pinskier, RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health has established the Growing Strong Award. The award was established to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander registrars during the early stages of their general practice career. It is presented each year at the RACGP’s annual conference, with the recipient getting support to attend the conference (including airfares, accommodation and registration), with all remaining funding going towards the recipient’s exam fees.

The Growing Strong Award supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars and complements the RACGP’s existing Standing Strong Together Award, which is open to Fellows working to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.


RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is one of Australia’s highest health priorities. The RACGP is committed to raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs and founded the faculty of RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in 2010 to help close the gap in health and wellbeing outcomes.

RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health advocates for culturally appropriate health delivery systems that improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The RACGP is dedicated to growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander general practice workforce and building workforce equity. Our dedicated faculty provides specialised support and activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates applying for and completing the AGPT Program, as well as for registrars working towards Fellowship of the RACGP.

The RACGP’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and registrars have access to:

- support to complete the selection process for the AGPT Program, including workshops to help prepare for the AGPT national entry assessment
- tailored Fellowship exam support
- GP mentors
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars and peers
- the Yagila Wadamba Support Program
- the Growing Strong Award
- tailored webinars.

The RACGP also partners with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including the Indigenous General Practice Registrars Network, Australian Indigenous Doctors Association and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.


RACGP Foundation

Established in the 1950s, the RACGP Foundation supports GPs and registrars to do medical research into primary healthcare and develops research career pathways. The foundation raises funds to offer a diverse range of research grants, scholarships, Fellowships and awards that provide opportunities to complete valuable research.

The grants are designed specifically for early-career researchers and encourages registrars interested in general practice research to apply for funding and gain experience in the field. Through funding and industry collaboration and by nurturing registrars and general practice researchers, we can build the body of evidence that can be translated into practice – from researcher to practitioner to patient.

Visit [https://foundation.racgp.org.au/grants](https://foundation.racgp.org.au/grants) or email foundation@racgp.org.au for more information.
**RACGP Specific Interests**

RACGP Specific Interests, a national faculty of the RACGP, recognises the additional interests and/or expertise held by GPs. Membership is not constrained by geographical location, clinical expertise or career stage.

The career of a GP is one of lifelong learning, and interests may change over time. Whether this is due to personal interests, clinical advancements or the changing requirements of a GP’s patient population, RACGP Specific Interests supports GPs to engage with and learn from like-minded colleagues. GPs with subject-matter expertise have established, and lead, a wide range RACGP Specific Interests groups, which cover clinical, vocational and organisational areas of general practice. Group activities vary, with some involved in developing educational materials and clinical guidelines, some advising on policy and advocacy opportunities, and others sharing research and news through member communications and online meetings. All groups offer networking and learning opportunities to their members.

RACGP Specific Interests membership is a free member benefit available to all RACGP members. Visit www.racgp.org.au/the-racgp/faculties/specific-interests for more information.

**Australian Defence Force**

Australian Defence Force (ADF) doctors provide quality healthcare to those serving in a distinct field of practice. GPs working in an ADF environment are largely serving a younger, fitter, healthier patient population than they would in a civilian population. As an ADF GP, you may work in difficult environments requiring a broad range of skills and a flexible and adaptable approach to providing quality care in order to optimise outcomes for your patients. This may require careful management of resources and effective triaging in environments with limited access to complex investigations and specialist care; it may include mass casualty triaging in war zones and disaster recovery environments.

Another key aspect of military general practice is preventive health: immunisation, health education and chemoprophylaxis programs, prevention of heat exhaustion, mitigation of acute and chronic musculoskeletal injuries, prevention of physical and mental fatigue, and identification of individuals at risk of acute and chronic mental health disorders are all components of preventive healthcare.
FRACGP and FARGP

The Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (FRACGP) is a specialist general practice qualification accredited by the Australian Medical Council.

The attainment of FRACGP signifies a GP as competent to deliver safe, specialised and high-quality general practice care in Australia’s metropolitan, rural, remote and very remote communities.
About Fellowship of the RACGP

Attaining FRACGP demonstrates to governments, the general practice profession, and Australian and overseas communities that you’ve met the required level of competence to practise safely and unsupervised in any Australian general practice setting – metropolitan, rural, remote and very remote communities. It also allows you to access specialist medical registration and, consequently, A1 rebate rates under Medicare legislation.

The pathway to awarding FRACGP involves recognising differences in experience, formal and informal learning, required general practice experience, and assessment processes, including formative and summative assessments.

The FRACGP is underpinned by a comprehensive suite of RACGP education materials, including the Competency profile of the Australian GP at the point of Fellowship, the Curriculum for Australian General Practice (https://www.racgp.org.au/education/education-providers/curriculum) and the Standards for General Practice Training (https://www.racgp.org.au/standards-for-gp-training).

Five reasons to choose RACGP Fellowship

**Support**

The RACGP supports nine out of every 10 Australian GPs, including 5500 registrars working towards RACGP Fellowship.

**Rural**

With more than 20,000 rural members, RACGP rural registrars benefit from an established, well-supported program that meets their specific needs.

**Flexibility**

RACGP registrars have flexible training arrangements, as well as having the option to undertake further training for a Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) and rural generalist training.

**Advocacy**

With more than 40,000 members, the RACGP has a powerful voice to advocate for registrar members at all levels of government.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce**

The RACGP provides dedicated support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors applying for the AGPT Program and registrars working towards FRACGP.

About additional rural skills training

GPs are an integral part of rural communities, and the skills they practise depend on the context in which they work and the specific needs of their community.

The term “rural generalist” describes a rural GP who is working to the full scope of their practice with skill sets informed by the needs of the community they serve. Their skills encompass comprehensive general practice and emergency care and required components of other non-GP specialist care in hospital and community settings.

Rural generalist medicine is a well-established model of care practised by many GPs in rural and remote areas across Australia. The RACGP’s FARGP qualification is recognised as an appropriate end point for rural generalist training on state and territory rural generalist programs and under the AGPT Rural Generalist (AGPT RG) Policy, which you can find on the Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/agpt-program-rural-generalist-policy-2020.

The FARGP pathway offers the greatest benefits when completed over the full period of the training program, well before you start preparing for your final FRACGP exams.

The FARGP allows you to develop additional emergency medicine skills and procedural or non-procedural skills in:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- adult internal medicine
- anaesthetics
- child health
- emergency medicine
- mental health care
- obstetrics
- palliative care
- surgery.

Additional skills will be considered on application to the RACGP Rural Censor as part of an individually designed program.

To attain your FARGP, you must have:

- an FARGP learning plan(s)
- 12 months in a rural general practice setting
- 12 months of additional rural skills training in an accredited procedural or non-procedural training post
- six months of core emergency medicine training.

You have four years to achieve FRACGP and FARGP. Developing your additional rural skills with the FARGP helps give patients more options for accessing safe and comprehensive care in Australia’s rural, remote and very remote communities.

The RACGP journey towards Fellowship

Medical school (Four to six years)

Hospital training time
The minimum requirement for entry to general practice training is one year of training in an Australian or New Zealand hospital. If you have more than one year of hospital training experience, you may be eligible to reduce your training time.

Applying for general practice training
If you decide that a career in general practice is for you, submit an application during your intern year or any year subsequent (ie PGY2 onwards).

FARGP registrar pathway
Enrolling in the FARGP lets you complete an extra 12 months of advanced rural skills training, extending your training from three to four years. Enrolling in the RG gives you another 12 months. We recommend completing the FARGP and RG during your training so you get the most out of your experience and fulfill the majority requirements before doing the Fellowship exams. You can also complete the FARGP and RG post-Fellowship (see below).

General practice training (three years)
Vocational training towards FRACGP is three years full time (or part-time equivalent), comprising hospital training (12 months), general practice placements (18 months) and extended skills (six months).

Academic post
You can apply for an academic post term after completing your first general practice term. Applications may open before you finish this term, so keep an eye on application dates and discuss with your training coordinator early. Register your interest and start thinking about your research project. This 12-month post is completed concurrently with your clinical placement. The post can be done as the extended skills component of your training program, as extended training time or as an FARGP ARST, if approved by the RACGP Rural Censor.

RACGP Fellowship examinations
The RACGP assessment comprises three segments: the Applied Knowledge Test (AKT), the Key Feature Problem (KFP), and the Clinical Competency Exam.

Application for Fellowship
Successful completion of RACGP training and assessment.

FARGP practising rural general practitioner pathway
The FARGP and RG are available to eligible practising rural GPs. The pathway recognises the skills, experience and training of practising rural GPs.

RACGP Fellowship

Continuing professional development
Vocational training pathway Additional options

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Applying to specialise in general practice

AGPT Program
The AGPT Program is the leading training program for medical graduates who wish to pursue a career as a GP in Australia. Training is undertaken within 11 training regions across the country.

The program is a combination of self-directed and face-to-face training within accredited medical facilities by accredited supervisors. AGPT training with the RACGP is based on the RACGP’s educational framework.

You can apply to the AGPT Program any time from your intern year onwards. AGPT application dates can vary year to year; however, applications usually open in late March or early April and remain open for a period of five weeks.

Visit www.racgp.org.au/agpt for further information and to download a copy of the latest selection guide.

General Practice Experience Pathway
The RACGP is committed to developing a new education and training program to support doctors on the General Practice Experience (GPE) Pathway when the Department of Health subsidy for the Practice Experience Program (PEP) ends in June 2023. The PEP - Standard stream will be replaced by this self-funded program, and applications will open in mid-2022 for commencement in 2023.

In addition to the AGPT program and the Remote Vocational Training Scheme, this program will be one of three RACGP-approved programs for preparing for Fellowship with the RACGP.

Register your interest to receive more information as it becomes available: www.racgp.org.au/prep-eoi

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FRACGP exams
Successful completion of the RACGP Fellowship exams is required for FRACGP. The exams consist of three segments:

- the Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) (multiple choice)
- Key Feature Problem (KFP) (short answer written exam)
- the Clinical Competency Exam (CCE).

Registrars need to have met the following eligibility requirements in order to sit the Fellowship exams:

- Has a current Australian medical registration
- Is a current financial membership of the RACGP
- Has been identified by their vocational training provider as ready to sit their RACGP exams
- Has met their vocational training providers exam eligibility requirements.

Fellowship exam preparation and support
The RACGP is committed to providing a large suite of resources and information to ensure that candidates are informed about all aspects of the RACGP Fellowship exams, from theory to quality assurance and results. As an RACGP member, you have access to all of these resources.

Public reports are produced following each exam that detail standards, results and an analysis of the examination.

These along with the following guides and resources are recommended to all candidates preparing to sit a Fellowship exam.

RACGP’s Assessments and Examinations Candidate Handbook provides detail relating to enrolment, eligibility, and other policy related areas.

The RACGP’s two Examinations Guides provide in-depth detail on each of the Fellowship Examinations including the format, timing, and style of each exam as well as how best to prepare.

Candidates enrolled in the AKT or KFP are provided with practice exams in advance of exam dates to gain insight into exam format and timing.

In addition to these resources, the Clinical Competency Exam webpage contains links to a suite of exam preparation resources including interactive gplearning modules, practice cases, marking grids, video examples and FAQs.

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Membership tailored to you

The RACGP is a strong collegiate network of more than 39,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice across metropolitan, regional and rural areas of Australia and overseas. The RACGP provides education, advocacy and engagement for and on behalf of its members.

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<th>Membership inclusions</th>
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<td><strong>Australian Journal of General Practice (AJGP)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RACGP Plus</strong></td>
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Visit [racgp.org.au](http://racgp.org.au) and search ‘membership’ for further information.

Membership requirements

General practice registrars must be financial RACGP members prior to their first day of training in the AGPT Program and throughout their training. Any training undertaken while not a financial RACGP member will not be recognised towards FRACGP.

The RACGP encourages maintaining membership from medical school onwards; the resources and benefits are specifically designed to support members on their general practice journey.

Visit [racgp.org.au](http://racgp.org.au) and search ‘registrar membership policy’ for further information.
For more information on the pathway to general practice contact:

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