Guide to your career in **general practice**
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

“The heart of general practice will always be our patients. Continuity of care is a privilege other medical specialists rarely get to enjoy.”
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 practise 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

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The guide will:

- answer your questions about general practice as a specialty
- give you an idea of what a career in general practice could involve
- outline your options throughout your career
- map out the steps to becoming a GP with the RACGP
No two days are the same in the life of a GP, and it’s 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’ll 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. It’s based on building strong, continuing relationships with a view to providing coordinated, comprehensive, person-centred healthcare to individuals and families in their community.

General practice is often a patient’s first port of call. GPs are trained to treat a range of medical conditions, focusing on the whole person. They also focus on preventive health and are best placed to advise on a variety of ways to stay healthy.

What does a GP do?

Working in general practice is different to working in a hospital and to many other specialties. Working in the community as the first contact within the health system, 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’s 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.

Access to services and investigations can be different to in a hospital. GPs get to know what’s available and how to help their patients access services, which requires knowledge of the individual patient, their circumstances and their community. Getting to know patients and offering ongoing, continuity of care is a special privilege of general practice. Over time, GPs really get to know their patients and their lives.

Importantly, GPs also get the chance to practise preventive medicine and proactively help patients maintain their health, which is very rewarding.

Why general practice?

Not only does general practice offer a wide range of experience in 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 variety of community settings, including the city, suburbs, regional towns, rural communities, isolated rural settings and overseas. These 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 lets you 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 either during your training or after being admitted to Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP) by undertaking further formal studies.

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 locations to suit your lifestyle.

Business ownership

You could even 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, and the RACGP will support you all the way.

Characteristics and skill set of a GP

As general practice is largely relationship-based, you’ll need to 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, you’ll function 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. But they’re not isolated; you’ll have plenty of professional support, whether you’re in a large city or a remote rural area.
Options in general practice

General practice offers a range of options, letting you focus on your areas of interest or tailor your career to suit your desired work-life balance.

Clinical practices vary in size, site and structure. Some are private, and 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. Some GPs might do sessions in hospitals or in non-clinical areas, such as administration, teaching or research. You’ll have many options and possibilities.

Here, we set out some other opportunities you can explore during your RACGP general practice training and expand on later in your career.
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 representing four out of five 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. With RACGP Fellowship you can practice in any location – every postcode, every community. In some rural and remote areas, GPs with additional rural skills training 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 RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship 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, GPs in training and GPs
- offers opportunities for networking, mentoring and professional development.


General practice research

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

If you join the Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program, you’ll 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 do your own research project during your training by applying for an academic post term. 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. Visit www.racgp.org.au/research-training for more information.

If you’re not interested in an academic post or you’re 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 foundation.racgp.org.au/grants for more information.

Options in general practice

Extended skills training

The AGPT Program also offers extended skills training. This is a six-month, full-time-equivalent post that deepens your knowledge and skills and expands the scope of practice in particular areas relevant to primary medical care.

You can choose from many areas of study 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 GPs in training. The two-day workshop concentrates on exam performance and other key areas of general practice training. Participants can 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. Visit www.racgp.org.au/yagila-wadamba for more information.

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. Established in the 1950s, the RACGP Foundation supports GPs and GPs in training to do medical research into primary healthcare and develop 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 GPs in training interested in general practice research to apply for funding and gain experience in the field. Through funding and industry collaboration and by nurturing GPs in training and general practice researchers, we can build the body of evidence that can be translated into practice – from researcher to practitioner to patient.

The Growing Strong Award supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GPs in training and complements the RACGP’s Standing Strong Award, which is open to Fellows working to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Visit foundation.racgp.org.au/grants or email foundation@racgp.org.au for more information.
RACGP Specific Interests

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

The career of a GP is one of lifelong learning, and your 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 you to engage with and learn from like-minded colleagues. GPs with subject-matter expertise have established, and lead, a wide range of 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 benefit available to all RACGP members.


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 setting. As an ADF GP in training, you may work in difficult environments requiring a broad range of skills and a flexible and adaptable approach to providing quality care to optimise outcomes for your patients. This may require careful management of resources and effective triaging in settings 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.
RACGP Fellowship

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

The admittance to FRACGP means a GP is competent to deliver safe, specialised and high-quality general practice care in Australia’s metropolitan, rural, remote and very remote communities.

The Rural Generalist Fellowship (FRACGP-RG) is an additional qualification that gives you the opportunity to develop further emergency medicine skills and procedural or non-procedural skills relevant to working in rural, remote and very remote communities.
RACGP Fellowship

About RACGP Fellowship

Admittance to Fellowship 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 Fellowship involves recognising differences in experience, formal and informal learning, required general practice experience, and assessment processes, including formative and summative assessments.

Five reasons to choose RACGP Fellowship

Support

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

Rural focus

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

Flexibility

RACGP GPs in training have flexible training arrangements, as well as the option to do further training for the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship.

Advocacy

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

The RACGP provides dedicated support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GPs in training working towards FRACGP.

About RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship

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 an extended 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 Rural Generalist Fellowship 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 RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship 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 be admitted to the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship, you must have:

- 12 months in a rural general practice setting
- 12 months of ARST in an accredited procedural or non-procedural training post
- six months of core emergency medicine training.

Developing your additional rural skills with the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship helps give patients more options for accessing safe and comprehensive care in Australia’s rural, remote and very remote communities.

The AGPT journey towards Fellowship

Medical school (Four to six years)

Applying for general practice training
Submit an application during your intern year or any year subsequent (ie PGY2 onwards).

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 a post after completing your first general practice term. Applications may open before you finish this term, so keep an eye on dates and discuss with your training coordinator early. Register your interest and think 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 RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship ARST, if approved by the RACGP Rural Censor.

RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship registrar pathway
Enrolling in the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship lets you complete an extra 12 months of ARST, extending your training to four years. Enrolling in the Rural Generalist (RG) training gives you another 12 months. We recommend completing the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship during your training to get the most out of your experience and fulfil the majority requirements before doing the exams. You can also complete the RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship post-Fellowship (see right).

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.

Vocational training pathway
Additional options

RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship practising rural general practitioner pathway
The RACGP Rural Generalist Fellowship is available to eligible practising GPs. The pathway recognises the skills, experience and training of practising rural GPs.

RACGP Fellowship exams
The RACGP Fellowship exams comprises three segments: the Applied Knowledge Test, the Key Feature Problem exam, and the Clinical Competency Exam.

Application for Fellowship
Successful completion of RACGP training and assessment.
Applying to specialise in general practice

Australian General Practice Training Program

The Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program is the leading training program for medical graduates who want to pursue a career as a GP in Australia. Training is done 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 more information and to download a copy of the latest application handbook.

General Practice Experience Pathway

The General Practice Experience pathway is for experienced doctors who have already been working in general practice, whether in Australia or overseas.

Develop your skills by completing the new Fellowship Support Program (FSP) from January 2023. FSP will replace the Practice Experience Program (PEP), and applications open in July 2022. The FSP includes education, training and assessment preparation to support participants on their Fellowship journey.

Get the latest information about the two annual intakes on our website: www.racgp.org.au/fsp

RACGP Fellowship exams

Fellowship exams

Successful completion of the RACGP Fellowship exams is required to be admitted to Fellowship of the RACGP. 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).

To sit the Fellowship exams, you must:

- have a current Australian medical registration
- be a current financial member of the RACGP
- have been identified by your vocational training provider as ready to sit your RACGP exams
- have met your vocational training provider’s 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 exam. These, along with the following guides and resources, are recommended to all candidates preparing to sit a Fellowship exam.

The RACGP’s Assessments and Examinations Candidate Handbook (www.racgp.org.au/exam-handbook) provides detail relating to enrolment, eligibility, and other policy related areas.

The RACGP’s two Examination guides detail each of the Fellowship exams, including the format, timing and style of each exam as well as how best to prepare.

Candidates enrolled in the AKT or KFP are given practice exams to learn about exam format and timing.

The Clinical Competency Exam webpage (www.racgp.org.au/cce) contains links to a suite of exam preparation resources, including interactive gplearning modules, practice cases, marking grids, video examples and FAQs.
RACGP membership

Membership tailored to you
The RACGP is a strong collegiate network of more than 40,000 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.

Membership inclusions

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<tr>
<th>Membership inclusions</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Australian Journal of General Practice (AJGP)</strong></td>
<td>The RACGP’s evidence-based medical journal, which helps GPs provide the highest-quality patient care</td>
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<td>gplearning</td>
<td>More than 300 hours of interactive online activities</td>
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<td>check</td>
<td>Case studies consisting of multiple-choice questions and answers</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Murtagh Library</td>
<td>A unique collection of specialist general-practice-related resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>newsGP</td>
<td>An email with the latest headlines on Australian general practice straight to your inbox five days a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Medicines Handbook</td>
<td>A $30 discount off this prescribed guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>RACGP Plus</td>
<td>A range of discounts on professional and personal services</td>
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Get tailored education to suit your professional needs and learn in a format that suits you.

The RACGP strongly advocates on behalf of GPs and future GPs to enhance the quality of patient care.

Connect with colleagues and gain access to information and resources to help you at each stage of your career.


Membership requirements
You must be financial RACGP members prior to your first day of training with the RACGP and throughout your training. Any training completed while not a financial RACGP member won’t be recognised towards your training time.

The RACGP encourages you to maintain membership from medical school onwards; the resources and benefits are specifically designed to support you on your general practice journey.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘registrar membership policy’ for more information.
For more information on the pathway to general practice, contact:

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