General practice career guide
Welcome to the RACGP’s General practice career guide. 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
Daniel said:
“The flexibility and the mobility that I get from this career choice and how it’s going to allow me to continue doing the things that I love... the idea of GP is really attractive to me for that reason.”
Dr Daniel Straw
PGY1 Intern

Jeanette said:
“I chose general practice because of my love for people. General practice allows me to care for my patients holistically. The RACGP has such great support systems, resources, reputation and an overall great training program. It is hard to say what I have enjoyed the most about registrar training, as it has been so great. As an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctor, my other joy would be caring for my community and my mob. I believe that, unlike many other areas of medicine, general practice is a shared journey with patients. There is something truly joyful and rewarding about caring for a person’s health on a holistic level.”
Dr Jeanette Wimbus
RACGP registrar member

Lawrence said:
“I chose general practice as the continuity of care provided by GPs is one of the many attractive features of general practice. To be able to care for patients from cradle to grave is unique to general practice – creating deep bonds with patients that bring a great fulfillment is what makes general practice such an attractive career.”
Dr Lawrence Ling
RACGP registrar member

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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.
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 preventative 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 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 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 practice 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 inner-city, outer-suburban, 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 other 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 interests. 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 a general 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.
- 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.
Options in general practice

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 range in size, sites 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.
Options in general practice

General practice in rural and remote Australia

RACGP Rural is Australia’s largest representative body of rural GPs.
RACGP Rural has a long history in providing advocacy and support for rural and remote communities. The unique characteristics of rural and remote Australia offer diversity in terms of complex health presentations, and provide GPs with opportunities to expand their skills and take on a wide variety of clinical opportunities.

In many rural and remote areas across Australia, GPs with advanced rural skills training are the only specialist medical services (such as emergency medicine, mental health, anaesthesia and obstetrics) to which communities have access. Rural GPs respond to changes in patient needs and work to minimise barriers to healthcare access. Clinical opportunities for rural GPs may 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 recognises the challenges specific to rural and remote areas and supports its members in these communities through advocacy, research, education and policy development. RACGP Rural also provides access to resources, networking opportunities, mentoring and professional development.

RACGP Rural currently has more than 19,000 members, including more than 8500 GPs in rural and remote Australia, making it the largest representative body for rural GPs in Australia.

Additionally, RACGP Rural:
• contributes directly to rural health policy reforms
• delivers the Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) Program
• delivers a range of rural-focused education activities, including webinars and active learning modules (ALMs)
• administers the Rural Procedural Grants Program
• provides a range of learning resources to assist registrars and GPs working in rural and remote Australia
• offers members the opportunity to contribute to projects, events, and publications.

To learn about the RACGP’s FARGP, go to page 19.

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, as a result, founded RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in February 2010 to help ‘close the gap’.

By understanding the cultural context, RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health advocates for culturally appropriate health delivery systems that will improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The RACGP is committed to growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander general practice workforce and provides dedicated support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates applying for the AGPT Program and registrars working towards RACGP Fellowship.

The RACGP undertakes a range of activities dedicated to supporting Indigenous doctors and registrars throughout their general practice training journey. With the RACGP, Indigenous doctors and registrars will have access to a workshop to assist in preparing for the RACGP’s AGPT national assessment, GP mentors, other Indigenous registrars and peers on shareGP® and the fully funded Indigenous Fellowship Excellence Program (IFEP), the Growing Strong Award, and webinars.

The IFEP, which has been co-named by the Wurundjeri Council Yagal Wadamba (meaning ‘learn to heal’), is an annual support program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander general practice registrars. The two-day workshop is held in May every year and 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 also 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 journey.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘IFEP’ for further 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. The award was established to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander general practice registrars during the early stages of their general practice career. The award will be presented each year at the RACGP annual conference with the recipient receiving support to attend the conference (including airfares, accommodation and registration); all residual funding goes towards the recipient’s examination fees.

The Growing Strong Award is aimed at supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars and complements the RACGP’s existing Standing Strong Together Award, which is open to Fellows who are working to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘Growing Strong Award’ for further information.

*shareGP is the RACGP’s professional online meeting space for GPs. shareGP is a secure, private GP community exclusive to RACGP members.
General practice research

You can become involved in research during your general practice training by applying for an academic term as part of your FRACGP or FARGP. Working part-time in a university department and in general practice broadens your career opportunities.

Research in general practice is essential for the improvement of patient health outcomes. It is important for GPs to understand how to access and apply research evidence to their clinical work as all GPs are research users.

It is equally important that clinical questions arising from general practice are answered by research undertaken within the general practice setting. Getting involved in supervised research early in your career enables you to develop valuable skills to take into your clinical work and can act as a stepping stone towards an academic career. GPs can be involved in research at various levels, from recruiting patients for projects undertaken by others, to actively engaging in the research process as a co-investigator of leading research projects. There is a wealth of opportunities to help you find the right level of research for you during your general practice training.

You can become involved in research during your general practice training by applying for an academic term as part of the RACGP training pathway and working part-time in a university department. An academic term can be completed as either an extended skills post or as optional additional training time and can occasionally count toward a higher degree (e.g., Master of Medicine or a Doctor of Philosophy [PhD]). Involvement in research will equip you with skills you can use throughout your medical career.

You can also become involved in a research project by contacting your local university department of general practice, rural clinical school, or seek funding to conduct research through the RACGP Foundation.

RACGP Foundation

The RACGP Foundation was founded in the 1950s to support GPs and general practice registrars to conduct medical research into primary healthcare and develop research career pathways. This is done by raising funds to support a diverse range of research grants, scholarships, fellowships and awards that provide our members with opportunities to undertake this valuable research.

By participating in research, GPs are building the evidence that is necessary to deliver the highest quality care and best health outcomes to all Australians. Around 86% of all Australians visit a GP each year and how patients are treated in general practice must be based on sound research. Much of this evidence can only be acquired from research in the general practice setting, making continued investment in this worthwhile cause vital.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘grants’ or email foundation@racgp.org.au for further information.

RACGP 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 dermatology, sports medicine, diabetes, paediatrics or palliative care, you can choose to develop specific skills in that area after attaining FRACGP by undertaking further formal studies to expand on these skills.

This can be done by applying to complete postgraduate qualifications in your specific interest area, for example, the Diploma of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (DRANZCOG) via RANZCOG, or the Certificate of Primary Care Dermatology through the RACGP’s partnership with the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

RACGP Specific Interests is a national faculty established by the RACGP in order to help recognise the additional interest and expertise held by GPs in selected areas of general practice. The faculty includes a number of networks that are defined by a clinical, educational, contextual or organisational aspect of general practice. Members of RACGP Specific Interests have the opportunity to share knowledge and develop educational materials with other like-minded GPs.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘specific interests’ for further 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.

Overseas posts

If you are interested in gaining experience abroad, the RACGP’s training pathway can include completion of part of your general practice training overseas as extended skills training or as an advanced rural skills term (ARST).

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘ARST’ or email fargp@racgp.org.au for further information.

Extended skills training

Extended skills training is a six-month post undertaken full time (part time options are available) for the purpose of extending the depth and breadth of your skill base in areas relevant to primary medical care. It is possible to undertake an elective post overseas.

Please note, there are restrictions regarding at which point in your training pathway the overseas training posts can be undertaken, and you need to obtain the prospective support of your Regional Training Organisation (RTO) and prospective approval from the RACGP Censor-in-Chief.

If you are unable to undertake an overseas post during your vocational training, you may choose to practise overseas for a period of time after completing your Fellowship. The portability of general practice as a medical specialty, combined with the international recognition of FRACGP, makes this an exciting possibility.
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 in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP)

GP skills depend on the context in which they work and the specific needs of their community.
The FARGP provides an opportunity to develop additional procedural or non-procedural skills, emergency medicine skills and to build greater connections with your community.
The FARGP offers the greatest benefits when completed over the full period of the training program, well before you start preparing for your final FRACGP exams.

FARGP pathway offers:
- the FARGP learning plan and reflection activity
- 12 months in a rural general practice setting
- 12 months of advanced rural skills training in an accredited procedural or non-procedural training post
- a six-month rural general practice community-focused project
- an emergency medicine module, which includes a series of case studies, skills audit and satisfactory completion of two advanced emergency skills courses.

The FARGP is completed on an interactive learning platform accessed via gplearning.
Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘FARGP’ for further information.

About FRACGP

The attainment of FRACGP demonstrates to governments, the general practice profession, and Australian and overseas communities that a GP has 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 confers the ability to access specialist medical registration and, consequently, A1 rebate rates under Medicare legislation.

The pathway to awarding FRACGP encompasses recognising differences in experience, formal and informal learning, required general practice experience and assessment processes, including formative and summative activities and examinations. It is underpinned by a comprehensive suite of RACGP educational documents, including the Competency profile of the Australian general practitioner at the point of Fellowship, the RACGP’s Curriculum for Australian General Practice 2016 and Standards for general practice training.

Five reasons to choose RACGP Fellowship

| Support | The RACGP supports 9/10 Australian GPs, including 5500 registrars working towards RACGP Fellowship. |
| Rural | With more than 18,000 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). |
| Advocacy | With more than 38,000 members, the RACGP has a powerful voice to advocate for registrar members at the highest 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 RACGP Fellowship. |
The RACGP journey towards Fellowship

Medical school (Four to six years)

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

General practice training (three years)
Vocational training towards RACGP Fellowship (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).

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

Application for fellowship
Successful completion of RACGP training and assessment.

RACGP Fellowship

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 do have more than one year of hospital training experience upon entry to general practice training, you may be eligible to reduce your training time.

FARGP registrar pathway
Enrolling in the Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) will enable you to complete an additional 12 months of Advanced Rural Skills Training (ARST), taking your training from three years to four years. It is recommended that the FARGP is undertaken during general practice training to enable you to get the most out of your experience and fulfill the majority of FARGP requirements before heading into the FRACGP exams. FARGP can also be undertaken post-Fellowship (see below).

Academic post
You can apply for an academic post after GPT1 – your first general practice term. The post is for 12 months and is undertaken concurrently with a general practice placement. The term can be undertaken as the extended skills component of the training program, extended training time, or as a FARGP ARST if approved by the Rural Censor.

FARGP practising rural general practitioner pathway
The FARGP is available to eligible practising general practitioners (GPs). The pathway recognises the skills, experience and training of practising rural GPs.

Continuing professional development
Vocational training pathway
additional options
**Applying to specialise in general practice**

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**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 with a regional training organisation (RTO).

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 intern year onwards. AGPT application dates can vary year to year; however, applications usually open in late March or early April each year and remain open for a period of five weeks.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘AGPT’ for further information and to download a copy of the latest selection guide.

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**Regional training organisations**

An RTO is an organisation that delivers education and training within a specific geographical region. There are currently nine RTOs that cover 11 training regions. Currently funded by the Department of Health (DoH), RTOs are accredited every three years against the RACGP’s Standards for general practice training through the bi-college accreditation process.

For over 15 years, RTOs have provided general practice registrars with best in class general practice training, ensuring an appropriate breadth of experience is gained. The RTOs additionally have a role in workforce distribution helping the majority of Australians access properly trained GPs by appropriate placements. You will train with one RTO on either the general or rural pathway. Your RTO will be with you every step of the way throughout your GP training.

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**FRACGP exams**

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

- a multiple choice exam; the Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) (online segment)
- a short answer written exam; Key Feature Problem (KFP) (online segment)
- the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE).

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

- current Australian medical registration
- current financial membership of the RACGP
- been identified by their vocational training provider as ready to sit their RACGP exams
- met their vocational training provider’s examination eligibility requirements.

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**Fellowship exam preparation**

The RACGP Education Examinations guide is designed for current and prospective RACGP Fellowship exam candidates.

Everything candidates need to know about the Fellowship exam is contained within this guide, which outlines the standards, processes and features used to develop each exam and provides examples of question types and tips for preparation.

The purpose of the RACGP Education Examinations guide is to ensure that candidates are informed about all aspects of the RACGP Fellowship exams, from theory to quality assurance and results.

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**Fellowship exam support**

The RACGP offers a wide range of tools and resources to support candidates through their Fellowship exams. As an RACGP member you gain access to:

- Practice exam – gain insight into question structure and become familiar with the exam environment.
- Pre-exam workshops in all states – see what the exam is like by enrolling in an RACGP workshop.
- The Exam Support Online module – interactive activities, through gplearning, that test your knowledge and gain practical experience.
- check case studies – prepare for the RACGP exam through a series of clinical cases followed by multiple choice questions and answers.

Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘exams’ for further information.
RACGP membership

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, support and collegiality for and on behalf of its members.

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 and search ‘registrar membership policy’ for further information.

Membership Benefits

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Benefits</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Journal of General Practice (AJGP)</td>
<td>The RACGP’s evidence-based medical journal aimed at assisting GPs in providing the highest quality patient care</td>
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<tr>
<td>gplearning</td>
<td>More than 300 hours of interactive online activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>check</td>
<td>Case studies consisting of multiple-choice questions and answers</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Murtagh Library Discovery tool</td>
<td>Unified search across RACGP library databases and resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>NewsGP</td>
<td>Receive the latest headlines on Australian general practice straight to your inbox twice a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Medicines Handbook</td>
<td>Members receive $30 off this prescribed guide</td>
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Visit racgp.org.au and search ‘membership’ for further information.

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

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

T 1800 4RACGP | 1800 472 247
E racgp@racgp.org.au
becomeaGP.org.au

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