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Seven overseas GPs to wing way to rural practices



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Up to 11 overseas GPs are being supported to relocate to rural practices via a now-ended scheme [Image: Douglas Bagg on Unsplash]

Rural practices want a short-lived scheme offering relocation funding incentives to overseas GPs to continue, so struggling practices can compete in the global market.

Lobbying last year by Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network led to the initiative, funded by Te Whatu Ora, being opened to all rural general practices, not just those owned by Te Whatu Ora, but only until 30 June.

Te Whatu Ora workforce general manager Clair Bosworth says the agency received 12 applications from private rural providers in support of recruiting an international GP before last month's cutoff.

Seven of the applications were approved, and four were still being processed, Ms Bosworth says in an emailed response.

“Although the uptake numbers were relatively low, the initiative has been well received by the funded rural primary care sector,” she says.

A website page says it is “not currently accepting new applications” after the funding closed.

The initiative offered up to \$20,000 tax-free, paid in two lump sums over a two-year bonding period for each eligible international GP recruited into an eligible rural primary care practice.

Hauora Taiwhenua chief executive Grant Davidson says it is lobbying for the relocation incentive funding to be extended as the country relies on overseas-trained GPs to boost the workforce.

“From our perspective, we have to work hard in an internationally competitive market to get people to New Zealand – and that relies on having incentives that other countries, such as Australia, offer,” Dr Davidson says.

OmniHealth rural practice Tuakau Health started its overseas recruiting efforts last year, says practice manager Majella Blackwood. It is in final negotiations now with two potential GPs and hopes that the applications for the incentive funding will continue. OmniHealth chief executive Mark Wills also hopes the scheme is extended as “the need is there quite profoundly”.

Dr Davidson says he understands that Te Whatu Ora has yet to decide what, if anything, it will do to support rural GP recruitment this financial year.

In response to a New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa query over the future of the GP relocation funding scheme, Ms Bosworth said continuing the initiative was “being considered”.

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