



**Australian Government**

**Medicare Australia**

# ***Practice Incentives Program***

**After Hours Incentive Guidelines – August 2011**

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## Introduction

The Practice Incentives Program (PIP) aims to encourage continuing improvements in general practice through financial incentives to support quality care, and improve access and health outcomes for patients. To be eligible to participate in the PIP, a practice must be accredited, or registered for accreditation, against the Royal Australia College of General Practitioners (RACGP) *Standards for general practices*. Practices must achieve full accreditation within 12 months of joining the PIP and maintain full accreditation thereafter.

Payments are made through the PIP:

- to encourage use of electronic health systems
- to ensure patients have access to after hours care
- to support rural practices
- to encourage rural general practitioners (GPs) to provide procedural services
- to support practices to employ practice nurses
- to encourage practices to teach medical students
- for participating in educational activities to improve prescribing behaviour
- to encourage cervical screening
- for best practice management of patients with asthma and diabetes
- to encourage GPs to provide increased and continuing services in Commonwealth-funded Residential Aged Care Facilities
- to support best practice management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients with chronic disease.

The PIP is administered by Medicare Australia on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA).

## Definition of a GP

For the purposes of the PIP, GPs include general practitioners and/or non-specialist medical practitioners, known as other medical practitioners, who provide non-referred services and are not GPs. General practitioners include Fellows of the RACGP and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), vocationally registered general practitioners and medical practitioners undertaking approved training.

## The Practice Incentives Program After Hours Incentive

The PIP After Hours Incentive aims to encourage general practices to ensure their patients have access to quality after hours care.

The payments are intended to help resource a quality after hours service and compensate practices that make themselves available for longer hours, in recognition of the additional pressures this entails. This includes practices that have no choice but to provide all of their after hours cover themselves (such as rural practices).

For the purposes of the PIP, after hours refers to:

- any time outside 8.00 am to 6.00 pm weekdays
- any time outside 8.00 am to 12 noon on Saturday
- all day on Sunday and public holidays.

## What are the Practice Incentives Program After Hours Incentive payments and requirements?

There are three levels (tiers) of after hours payments based on the level of after hours activity provided by the practice. The PIP After Hours Incentive payments are calculated at \$2.00 per Standardised Whole Patient Equivalent (SWPE) per year for each tier. Practices can qualify for one or more tiers and payments are cumulative (see Table 1).

To be eligible for payments through the PIP After Hours Incentive, practices are required to:

- make sure all regular practice patients have access to after hours care from a GP, 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- make sure all regular practice patients have access to out of hours visits from a GP (including visits to patients at home, in hospitals and in residential aged care facilities) where safe and reasonable. Refer to the RACGP *Standards for general practices* for a description of 'safe and reasonable' by visiting [www.racgp.org.au/standards](http://www.racgp.org.au/standards)
- make sure formal arrangements are in place with any after hours care providers used, such as an accredited MDS

- make sure any formal arrangements include the provision for patient information to be fed back to the practice
- make sure after hours arrangements are communicated clearly to practice patients
- provide after hours care for practice patients in accordance with the RACGP *Standards for general practices*
- meet the requirements of each tier claimed.

## **Tier 1**

To meet the requirements of Tier 1, the practice must make sure all regular practice patients have access to 24 hour care from a GP. This does not specifically mean a GP from the practice, as practices can enter into a cooperative arrangement, with an accredited Medical Deputising Service (MDS) or formal arrangements with a nearby practice in order to meet the requirements of Tier 1. These cooperative arrangements must be in place and formalised by the practice.

## **Tier 2**

To meet the requirements of Tier 2, practice GPs must provide all regular practice patients with at least 10 or 15 hours of after hours cover per week, on average, depending on the size of the practice. At all other times, practice patients may have access to after hours care through cooperative arrangements such as an MDS or formal arrangement with a nearby practice. Practices with a SWPE value of 2000 or less must provide at least 10 hours of after hours cover, and practices with a SWPE value of more than 2000 must provide at least 15 hours of after hours cover.

Practice GPs who are participating in cooperative arrangements after hours can count this service towards the Tier 2 requirements, provided their practice patients have access to the cooperative arrangements. The practice must have formal arrangements in place. Cooperative arrangements may include:

- formal arrangements with an accredited MDS
- formal agreement with a nearby practice(s) to provide cooperative after hours care
- formal collaborative agreement with a local hospital
- formal collaborative agreement with another after hours facility
- practice GPs providing all after hours cover from within the practice.

## **Tier 3**

To meet the requirements of Tier 3, practice GPs must provide all regular practice patients with 24 hour care, seven days a week. This payment is intended to support practices that have no choice but to provide all of their after hours cover themselves (such as rural practices).

Tier 3 payments are not generally available to practices participating in cooperative arrangements, as practice GPs are not usually providing care to their practice patients for the entire after hours period.

For quality and safety reasons, practices are encouraged to explore alternative approaches to providing 24 hour care, seven days a week themselves.

## **Is our practice eligible for the Practice Incentives Program After Hours Incentive?**

To be eligible for the PIP After Hours Incentive, the practice must:

- participate in the PIP
- meet the requirements of the PIP After Hours Incentive payments as described on the previous page.

**Table 1: Practice Incentives Program After Hours Incentive payment levels**

Level	Activity required for payment	Annual payment per SWPE*
Tier 1	The practice makes sure that all regular practice patients have access to 24 hour care from a GP, seven days a week, which may be through formalised cooperative arrangements and must include out of hours visits (at home, in residential aged care facilities and in hospitals), where safe and reasonable.	\$2.00
Tier 2	Practice GPs must provide the minimum level of after hours cover (dependent on practice size) for all regular practice patients. At all other times, practice patients must have access to after hours care through formalised cooperative arrangements.  <b>Practices with a SWPE* value of 2000 or less</b> Must provide their practice patients with at least 10 hours of after hours cover per week, on average.  <b>Practices with a SWPE* value of more than 2000</b> Must provide their practice patients with at least 15 hours of after hours cover per week, on average.	\$2.00
Tier 3	Practice GPs provide all regular practice patients with 24 hour care, seven days a week. The practice GPs must provide all regular practice patients with 24 hour care, seven days a week, including out of hours visits (at home, in residential aged care facilities and in hospitals), where safe and reasonable.	\$2.00

\* Standardised Whole Patient Equivalent (SWPE) is used to measure practice size and includes a weighting factor for the age and gender of patients. As a guide, the average full-time GP has a SWPE value of around 1000 SWPEs annually.

## How does the practice apply for the Practice Incentives Program After Hours Incentive?

Practices can apply for the PIP After Hours Incentive, through Medicare Australia, by completing:

- the relevant parts of the Practice Incentives Program and General Practice Immunisation Incentive application form at the time of joining the PIP, or
- the After Hours Incentive application form if the practice is already registered for the PIP.

The practice's authorised contact person is required to complete and sign the relevant parts of the application form.

## What are the obligations of the practice?

The practice must:

- be able to substantiate its claims for payments, including documentary evidence of after hours arrangements
- provide information to Medicare Australia as part of its ongoing audit program to verify that the practice meets the PIP eligibility requirements
- make sure information provided to Medicare Australia is accurate
- advise Medicare Australia in writing, of any changes to practice arrangements by the relevant 'point in time' date or within 14 calendar days, whichever date is earliest. Refer to the *Practice Incentives Program Guidelines* for more information.

On joining the PIP, the practice must nominate an authorised contact person(s), who will be required to verify on the practice's behalf, any changes to information submitted for PIP claims and payments.

## Is there an appeals process?

The PIP has an established appeals process. To request a review of a decision, the authorised contact person or the owners of the practice must write to Medicare Australia within 28 calendar days of the date on the notice of the decision they would like reviewed. Medicare Australia will review its decision and advise the practice in writing of the outcome.

## More Information

For more information about the PIP After Hours Incentive email [pip@medicareaustralia.gov.au](mailto:pip@medicareaustralia.gov.au) or go to [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/pip](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/pip) or call **1800 222 032** (call charges may apply) between 8.30 am to 5.00 pm Australian Central Standard Time (ACST), Monday to Friday.

These Guidelines are for information purposes only. While it is presently intended that the Commonwealth will make payments as set out in these Guidelines, the making of payments is at the sole discretion of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth may alter arrangements for the Practice Incentives Program at any time and without notice.

The Commonwealth does not accept any legal liability or responsibility for any injury, loss or damage incurred by the use of, reliance on, or interpretation of the information provided in these Guidelines.