



ANZCA
FPM

President and CEO

Australian and New Zealand
College of Anaesthetists

28 March 2025

Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA
Western Australia Minister for Health and Mental Health
Via email: minister.sanderson@dpc.wa.gov.au

cc: Dr Shirley Bowen
Director General, WA Department of Health
Via email: shirley.bowen@health.wa.gov.au

Dear Minister Sanderson

Anaesthesia and pain medicine priorities in Western Australia (WA)

On behalf of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), we congratulate you on your election success and continued appointment as Minister for Health and Mental Health.

ANZCA, along with the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM), is one of the largest medical colleges across Australia and New Zealand – responsible for the postgraduate training programs of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians.

We would like to highlight the key issues and priorities facing our WA specialists and the WA healthcare system generally.

WA anaesthesia trainees and new fellows

As of March 2025, in WA there are 116 active ANZCA anaesthesia trainees, 28 specialists currently approved to undertake the ANZCA specialist international medical graduate (SIMG) pathway and active 657 ANZCA fellows. They all work in 14 accredited training hospital sites across WA.

Unlike some Australian medical colleges, ANZCA does not set the number of training places. ANZCA accredits training hospitals, however the number of trainees, and therefore number of new Australian anaesthetists, is controlled by state and territory health departments and their affiliated hospitals. ANZCA has the capacity to train additional anaesthesia trainees if and when the number of training positions in hospitals are increased based on demand and need.

We would like to work with you and your department to ensure there is a sufficient number of anaesthesia trainee positions in each WA location and a robust pipeline of specialist anaesthetist workforce in the coming years.

Regional and rural training pathways

Addressing the geographic maldistribution of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians is a key goal of the college's current strategic plan. We recognise more training places are required across Australia, prioritised to regional and rural training pathways where possible.

Training doctors in rural areas is one of the main ways of retaining doctors in those areas, helping address WA's unique healthcare needs and reducing reliance on visiting and locum staff.

The Commonwealth Government's Specialist Training Program (STP) business function at ANZCA is continuing to grow. In Semester 2 2024, ANZCA received funding for approximately 55 STP and Integrated Rural Training Pipeline (IRTP) anaesthesia training posts across the country, nine of which are based in WA. This includes one post in regional WA, one pain training post and eight posts in private hospitals. In addition, there are two WA public hospitals, Albany and Bunbury, that are on the STP Reserve List for one STP post in each hospital. One of the items we would like to work with you on is to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for increased funded posts in WA public hospitals as well as certainty in future STP funding. Currently funding is only guaranteed until the end of Semester 2 2025 (Feb 2026), which doesn't always enable sustainability of planning.

Last year, the college established a Rural Training Pathways Coordinator to improve access to rural and regional training and help develop new rural training pathways for anaesthesia, including a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training pathways.

Over the next 16 months, this role will collaborate with the college's governance groups, as well as clinical services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, rural training hubs, universities and jurisdictional departments of health across Australia. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with you and your department as this progresses.

In addition, rural generalist practitioners with training in anaesthesia play vital roles in providing life-saving services to patients in many rural and remote communities across Australia. In 2023, ANZCA, with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), launched the [Rural Generalist Anaesthesia \(RGA\) Training Program](#) to deliver the education, training, and assessment of rural general practitioners and rural generalists providing anaesthesia services in rural locations.

To date we have grand-parented nearly 400 of these practitioners and currently training nearly 60 trainees under the program, with six located in WA. Of the 43 RGA-accredited training sites across the country, three are in WA. This is something we would like to continue to expand.

Consequences of chronic pain

Chronic pain has a profound impact on the health and welfare of Australians and an associated economic burden.

Pain prevalence differs by age and gender, cultural group and location across Australia, disproportionately affecting females and the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas.¹ A 2018 Deloitte Access Economics report into [The Cost of Pain in Australia](#) found that "the total financial costs associated with chronic pain were estimated to be \$73.2 billion in 2018, which equates to \$22,588 per person with chronic pain".

Currently, there is a shortage of Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) specialist pain medicine physicians in WA, with only 52 located there (in total there are just over 430 practising in Australia) and nine trainees in WA. Additional specialist pain medicine training positions are needed to address the ageing pain medicine workforce and to service highly disadvantaged regional pain patients who have far less access to appropriate pain

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-strategy-for-health-practitioner-pain-management-education?language=en>

management centres than those in metropolitan areas. These additional training positions would support the pilot of flexible accreditation in regional units.

We acknowledge that increasing the number of specialist pain medicine physicians and pain clinics needs to be a collaborative effort between government, hospitals and training organisations. ANZCA seeks to collaborate with the WA government to increase pain services to meet this growing need.

We look forward to collaborating with you and WA Health to improve anaesthesia and pain medicine services in the state and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you.

Yours sincerely



Professor David Story
President



Mr Nigel Fidgeon
Chief Executive Officer



Dr Bridget Hogan
ANZCA Western Australia Regional Committee Chair