



AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE » GUIDELINES

FEBRUARY 2009

THESE GUIDELINES PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRACTICE INCENTIVES PROGRAM (PIP) AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE.

1. INTRODUCTION

The PIP provides a number of incentives that aim to encourage general practices to improve the quality of care provided to patients. Practices must be accredited, or registered for accreditation against the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) *Standards for general practices* to participate in the PIP.

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 general practices in rural and remote areas to act as a referral point for women experiencing domestic violence; and
- to encourage GPs to provide increased and continuing services in Commonwealth-funded Residential Aged Care Facilities.

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

2. THE PIP AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE

The PIP After Hours Incentive aims to encourage general practices to provide patients with 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 cover their patients themselves (such as rural practices).

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

- any time outside 8 am - 6 pm weekdays and 8 am - 12 noon on Saturday; and
- public holidays.

3. WHAT ARE THE PIP 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. Eligible practices are provided with an annual payment of \$2 per Standardised Whole Patient Equivalent (SWPE) for each tier. Practices can qualify for one or more tiers and payments are cumulative (see Table 1 on the following page).

As a minimum, all practices must ensure their patients have access to care from a doctor, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This must include access to out of hours visits to patients at home, in residential aged care facilities and in hospitals, where safe and reasonable.

To meet the requirements of Tier 1, the practice must ensure all patients have access to 24 hour care from a doctor. Practices can use an accredited medical deputising service (MDS) to meet the requirements of Tier 1. The practice must have formal arrangements in place with the MDS.

To meet the requirements of Tier 2, GPs from within the practice must provide practice patients with at least 10 or 15 hours of after hours cover per week, on average, depending on practice size.

Practices with a SWPE value of 2,000 or less must provide at least 10 hours of after hours cover, where as practices with a SWPE value of more than 2,000 must provide at least 15 hours of after hours cover.

Practice GPs participating in cooperative arrangements 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.

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

AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE » GUIDELINES

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.

4. IS OUR PRACTICE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PIP AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE?

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

- participate in the PIP;
- ensure practice patients have access to after hours care by a doctor, 24 hours a day, seven days per week;
- ensure practice patients have access to out of hours visits by a doctor (including visits to patients at home, in hospitals and in residential aged care facilities) where safe and reasonable;
- ensure formal arrangements are in place with any after hours care providers used;
- ensure any formal arrangements include the provision for patient information to be fed back to the practice;
- ensure 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; and
- meet the requirements of each tier claimed.

Please refer to the RACGP *Standards* for a description of 'safe and reasonable'.

TABLE 1: PIP AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE PAYMENT LEVELS

| Level | Activity required for payment | Annual payment per SWPE* |
|---------------|---|--------------------------|
| Tier 1 | <p>The practice ensures practice patients have access to 24-hour care from a doctor.</p> <p>The practice ensures that patients have access to 24-hour care from a doctor, including out of hours visits (at home, in residential aged care facilities and in hospitals), where safe and reasonable.</p> | \$2.00 |
| Tier 2 | <p>The practice qualifies for Tier 1 and GPs from within the practice provide a minimum level of after hours cover for practice patients, depending on practice size.</p> <p>1. Practices with 2,000 SWPEs* or less must provide practice patients with, on average, at least 10 hours of their own after hours cover per week.</p> <p>2. Practices with more than 2,000 SWPEs must provide practice patients with, on average, at least 15 hours of their own after hours cover per week.</p> | \$2.00 |
| Tier 3 | <p>The practice qualifies for Tier 1 and GPs from within the practice provide all the after hours care for the practice patients.</p> <p>The practice GPs must provide 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.</p> | \$2.00 |

* SWPE is a measure of practice size based on patient load.
The average full-time GP sees around 1,000 SWPEs annually.

5. HOW DOES THE PRACTICE APPLY FOR THE PIP AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE?

Practices can apply for the PIP After Hours Incentive by completing the relevant parts of the *Practice Incentives Program and General Practice Immunisation Incentive* application form that is available from Medicare Australia.

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

AFTER HOURS INCENTIVE » GUIDELINES

6. WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE PRACTICE?

The practices must:

- be able to substantiate its claims for payment, 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 criteria;
- ensure information provided to Medicare Australia is accurate; and
- notify Medicare Australia in writing within 14 calendar days of any changes that may affect its eligibility for PIP payments.

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

7. IS THERE AN APPEALS PROCESS?

The PIP has an established appeals process. To appeal any decision made in regard to PIP eligibility or payments, the practice must write to Medicare Australia within 28 calendar days of receiving notice of the decision it would like reviewed. Medicare Australia will review its decision and advise the practice in writing of the outcome.

Advice on further avenues of appeal is available from Medicare Australia.

MORE INFORMATION:

Web: www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/pip

Email: pip@medicareaustralia.gov.au

Phone: 1800 222 032*

Hours of operation are between
8:30 am – 5:00 pm
Australian Central Standard Time

**Call charges apply from mobile and pay phones only.*

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 a matter in the sole discretion of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth may alter arrangements for the General Practice Immunisation Incentive 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.