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| Making it free to study Nursing and Midwifery Information brief – Scholarships and support for nurses to re-enter the workforce – Refresher Pathway September 2022  **OFFICIAL** |

## Background

Victoria’s healthcare workforce faces long-standing pressures that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid increased demand for care, ongoing action is needed to address issues regarding the supply and distribution of the healthcare workforce. The Victorian Government is implementing a range of initiatives to support Victoria’s healthcare workforce, including free university and specialist training for thousands of nurses and midwives.

This initiative aims to boost the health system, with more than 17,000 nurses and midwives recruited and trained as part of a massive hiring and upskilling initiative – building an army of home-grown health workers to care for Victorians.

## Funding purpose

Refresher programs provide a supported program of education, clinical teaching and ward-based learning for nurses and midwives who are current registered but have had a break from work in a hospital setting and want to ‘refresh’ skills or upskill in a particular clinical setting.

This funding will provide scholarships and support for 225 nurses and midwives per annum to return to practice in public health services via the refresher pathway.

The refresher pathway is designed for nurses and midwives who are currently registered but who lack recency of practice. Nurses and midwives can undertake refresher training, including up to eight weeks of clinical placement time at a public health service. This pathway is appropriate for nurses and midwives currently holding non-practicing registration in Victoria, as well as other nurses and midwives with full registration but needing recent clinical practice in health services.

## Funding principles

For each place in a refresher program, health services will receive a total of $15,000, including:

* $5,000 to cover the costs incurred by health service in running the program (e.g. clinical supervision and training, administration etc)
* $10,000 to provide a scholarship to each candidate accepted into the refresher program.

The scholarship component will enable candidates to cover the costs of program participation, such as living expenses while completing clinical placements.

The Government has previously funded health services to deliver refresher programs for nurses and midwives, as part of the Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund.

This component of ‘*Making it free to study nursing and midwifery*’ package will build on this program, providing funding for both metropolitan and regional health services to deliver more refresher program places over the next four years (from 2022-23 to 2025-26).

Given this is additional funding to that provided under the Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund, the allocation process for this funding has been updated. More details will be provided to health services directly.

## Application process

The department will provide funding to public health services to deliver refresher programs. Each health service will be responsible for recruiting eligible candidates to complete their refresher program.

Victorian public health services will be invited to apply for funding to deliver refresher programs. The department will provide information about the application process and prioritisation of applications directly to health services.

## Eligibility criteria

**Health service eligibility**

To be eligible for funding provided through this application process, health services must:

* be a Victorian public health service
* complete the expression of interest process for refresher programs
* nominate a lead agency that will receive and manage funding where health services choose to enter into partnerships to implement refresher programs (noting that all parties must be signatories to the application or an appropriate attachment)
* commence the refresher program/s within financial year in which they receive funding.

**Program participant eligibility**

To be eligible for the scholarship component, participants in funded refresher programs must:

* be a currently registered nurse or midwife with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia
* be an Australian citizen, a New Zealand citizen (or dual citizenship holders of either Australia or New Zealand), an Australian permanent resident or an Australian permanent humanitarian visa holder.
* have not previously received a department scholarship to complete a nursing and midwifery refresher program.

In addition, eligible applicants must agree to complete the course and seek employment in the targeted clinical area of practice (for which the scholarship was awarded) in the Victorian public health sector following completion of the refresher program.

## How do I apply?

* Applications for this funding will be co-ordinated through health services directly.
* Health services will be provided the information required to access this funding in October/November 2022 and will seek expressions of interest from health services after this time.

## Information for recipients of refresher program scholarships

Recipients are responsible for enrolling and completing the appropriate program by the due date and for any study costs incurred beyond the value of the scholarship.

If the recipient needs to defer or withdraw from their studies, they must notify the health service within one week of the change in study arrangements.

If the recipient plans to recommence study in the same year, they do not need to return the funds.

If the scholarship recipient does not return to study in the same year, the scholarship funds will be recalled.

The department is not required to withhold tax (PAYG) from scholarships paid. Recipients should be aware that:

* they may be liable to pay tax on their scholarship. For more information refer recipients to the calculator on the Australian Taxation Office website <<https://www.ato.gov.au/Calculators-and-tools/Is-my-scholarship-taxable/>>.
* they may be entitled to claim a tax deduction for self-education expenses – for more information please refer recipients to the Australian Taxation Office site at the following link <<https://www.ato.gov.au/individuals/income-and-deductions/deductions-you-can-claim/self-education-expenses>>.

The department strongly recommends that recipients seek independent tax advice in respect to their scholarship payment.