

# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Supplementary Guidance Note

Continuing Medical Education Support for Medical Specialists  
Advice as at 6 May 2020

## Update

The Department of Health and Human Services acknowledges that there is ongoing disruption to interstate and overseas travel arrangements and their effect on Continuing Medical Education (CME)-related activities for Medical Specialists. Accordingly, the Department of Health and Human Services is now authorising a maximum carry-over of unexpended 2019-20 CME Support into the 2020-21 financial year of up to \$15,000 per Medical Specialist (not pro-rata), provided that the amount carried over for any Medical Specialist **cannot exceed** their CME Support 'cap' for 2019-20.

This maximum level of carry-over is inclusive of the carry-over described in the questions and answers below and may only be used for CME-related activities that would involve multiple participants (that is, conferences, seminars or workshops) and/or require interstate or overseas air travel (including for Sabbatical Leave purposes).

## Travel for education or research purposes

Employers should express caution to Medical Specialists who have booked, are booking or are otherwise planning overseas or interstate travel for education or research purposes that while not required or initiated by the employer, would normally carry the imprimatur of or be funded (or reimbursed) by the employer. This includes travel for professional development (including CME) or Sabbatical Leave purposes.

It is recommended that such travel be postponed, particularly if it is to – or requires transit through – a country identified by the Commonwealth Government as a 'risk' country on its [Smart Traveller website](#).

The employer should work with the Medical Specialist to identify alternatives to that travel or to reschedule it for a time when the risks have reduced. The same risk assessment criteria mentioned above for work-related travel are applicable.

In some cases, the employer might refuse authorisation for the Medical Specialist to undertake such travel where the risks to the Medical Specialist and the organisation are deemed very high. No such decision should be made without consulting the Medical Specialist first and explaining the employer's assessment of the risks involved.

Where an employer seeks to cancel or withhold approval for an Medical Specialist's travel for operational purposes – for example to ensure an appropriate complement of critical staff is maintained to address this unfolding health event – the employer should be mindful not to cause disadvantage (financial or otherwise) to the Medical Specialist. The employer needs to be mindful of costs the Medical Specialist would incur if required to cancel/modify their travel arrangements.

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## What is the effect on a Medical Specialist's CME Support where an overseas or interstate conference (or similar) or Sabbatical Leave event is cancelled or approval to attend is withdrawn?

Where a Medical Specialist had approval to undertake a CME-related activity involving overseas travel to or through a country or countries that were not listed on the Commonwealth Government's [Smart Traveller website](#) as 'do not travel', 'reconsider your need to travel' or 'exercise a high degree of caution' in the context of the

coronavirus at the time the travel was booked and paid for (in whole or part) and that travel has been cancelled – or approval to attend has been withdrawn – because of issues relating to the coronavirus:

- the Medical Specialist can be reimbursed by their employer for any amount they are out-of-pocket expense after all refunds from travel insurers, airlines, hotels, conference organisers, etc have been sought and obtained where those travel expenses would have formed part of a CME Support claim; and
- that reimbursement of the out-of-pocket amount will be drawn against the Medical Specialist's CME Support cap for the 2019-20 financial year; and
- the difference between the gross amount of eligible travel expenses incurred that could have been claimed as CME Support in 2019-20 will remain available within the Medical Specialist's CME Support cap for 2019-20; and
- that amount of CME Support, if not expended in the balance of 2019-20, can be carried over into 2020-21 (adding to the CME Support cap for that year) to be claimed only for overseas travel expenses in 2020-21.

The above arrangements apply equally where interstate travel has been cancelled – or approval to attend has been withdrawn – because of issues relating to the coronavirus.

**What if the Medical Specialist had planned personal travel in combination with the CME-related travel, and/or was to be accompanied by a spouse, partner or family?**

Only those costs that would have been eligible to be claimed as CME Support will be reimbursed or treated as available CME Support in line with the above.

**What if the Medical Specialists booked or paid for travel after the country or countries they will travel to or through was listed on the Commonwealth Government's [Smart Traveller website](#) as 'do not travel', 'reconsider your need to travel' or 'exercise a high degree of caution' in the context of the coronavirus?**

Where a Medical Specialist has booked or paid (in whole or part) for travel to a 'risk' country after any destination or transit point was listed as a risk country there can be no carry over of CME Support in the way described above. Any decision on reimbursement of out-of-pocket expense after cancellation refunds will be assessed by the employer on a case-by-case basis.

The above arrangements apply equally to interstate travel costs where the relevant state or territory had implemented quarantine arrangements for travellers from interstate before that travel was booked or paid (in whole or part).