

2023 LHN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

MEMBER UPDATE No. 3, 30 August 2023

TEETHING PROBLEMS BUT WE ARE BEING HEARD

Welcome to the third edition of *2023 Member Update*.

Our last Update to members in May 2023 reported on our three-hour face to face meeting with representatives from RSS and LHNs to explain our contract claim in detail. At that time, we also explained our **genuine desire to collaborate and jointly problem solve** (rather than engage in 'hard bargain' like the most recent contract round).

There has been delay between the above meeting and our August 2023 engagements with RSS/LHNs due to officer leave. This noting that RSS has begun this process many months before the current contract required our reengagement.

We explained our different approach to developing a new contract was because our claims, while **prioritising**:

- a pay rise for GPs that had a relationship to inflation
- achieving payment for certain work (off site rates, shot stay, simultaneous OnCall)
- dealing with ongoing pay compliance problems
- improving LHN infrastructure and professional supports/clinical engagement **ALSO**,

sought to deal with **big picture issues requiring strategic response** best operationalised through GP goodwill; like: achieving work force sustainability and properly supporting GP investment in the GP training pipeline.

We noted that this collaborative style of negotiation would have 'teething' problems because developing trust and demonstrating commitment to work towards solutions can be challenging. We ended the March meeting believing RSS and LHS had agreed to this way forward and had agreed to codified outcomes either through GP contract terms or via some other peak mechanism (depending on appropriateness).

We used the time between meetings wisely by setting out a work program for RSS to offer draft positions on some issues and we analysed the **RSS Rural Medical Workforce Plan 2019 - 2024** and **RSS Rural Workforce Think Tank Reports 2022** to link our claims to the service and system goals RSS has planned for itself.



We met RSS/LHNs again on 14 August 2023 for three hours. As predicted, working through teething problems about process expectations and task management took up most of our allotted time. However, RSS/LHNs did ultimately agree to complete most of our original work plan which will allow forward momentum. Afterwards we convened our contract oversight executive group to explain where we believe we 'are at', consult their opinions and consider our ongoing approach.

Later, **RSS made an important gesture** by initiating an 'off-line', near three-hour, dialogue with us which has much improved trust and understanding. **Additionally, RSS agreed to the very unusual but generous step of allowing the Presidents of RDASA and AMASA to directly influence the content of a Cabinet submission** that will likely result in the SA Government determining its **funding scope** for your new contract.

It would undermine our influence to report on what was confidentially discussed but your leadership were respectfully heard. However, it seems true that some of our strategic and pay objectives are constrained by the absence of SA government power to make change because the issues are exclusively in the hands of the Commonwealth. While **Cabinet set funding parameters do not bind us**, such policy requires our pragmatic consideration when it comes to members deciding whether to endorse the in-principle content for the next contract.

A **next meeting** is not scheduled again because of officer leave. However, we expect to have another meeting with RSS/LHNs in a few weeks to progress issues not directly affected by the need for additional funding. We will seek a further meeting to discuss Cabinet's decisions about the contract process somewhere around late September 2023.

Our next Member Updates will advise on an upcoming RSS survey about LHN infrastructure (in response to one of our claims) and subsequently will report on the anticipated meetings with RSS and LHNs.

You are encouraged to **remain engaged** as this process evolves so that we can:

- harness the collective strength of rural GPs if we need to press hard for important outcomes;
- AND
- to ensure you, your patients' and your communities' interests are well served by the eventual outcome.

Distributing this *Update* to your non-member colleagues is useful, as is your suggestion that they join RDASA and/or AMA(SA).

Your Member Associations are, once again, doing the work and resourcing the process. Remember, without their leadership you would not have the average 21 percent salary increase cumulative over two years delivered by the current contract.



If you are not a member, please consider joining, by visiting the [RDASA](#) and [AMA\(SA\)](#) websites.

To provide comment or feedback, or for more information, please contact:

- RDASA: President: Dr Peter Rischbieth (Peter.Rischbieth@bridgeclinic.com.au) or Treasurer: Dr Scott Lewis (scott@wudinamedical.com.au)
- AMA(SA): President: Dr John Williams (jcwilliams1967@mac.com or president@amasa.org.au) or Chief Executive Officer: Ms Nicole Sykes (nsykes@amasa.org.au).

We look forward to providing further information and hearing your voices.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Williams', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Dr John Williams
President AMA(SA)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Bill Geyer', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Dr Bill Geyer
President RDASA