

Media Statement

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Female GPs Earn 25% Less Than Male Counterparts

- **Country doctor shortage persists despite 11% higher earnings**
- **GP earnings 32% lower than specialists, which could exacerbate GP shortage**

Female GPs earn an average 25 per cent less than their male counterparts, according to the first study into doctors' earnings released today by the Melbourne Institute and Monash University.

The surprise finding reveals that the gender income gap is greater for those at the frontline of the medical profession than it is for all of the nation's full-time adult workers, where average total earnings for women are 20.7 per cent lower than men according to the latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

"This is something of a mystery," says Professor Tony Scott, principal investigator for the research project. "While such differences persist in other occupations, this is particularly difficult to understand in an occupation where men and women have the same high level of education."

"Our results have adjusted for differences in hours worked, years of experience, and a host of other factors. It could be that female doctors see a different mix of patients than male doctors. We are puzzled and are continuing to look into this."

The study also found that female specialists were at an earnings disadvantage when compared with males, but the difference was smaller at 16.6 per cent.

The main findings show that the average annual pre-tax personal earnings of GPs and specialists were \$177,883 and \$316,570 respectively. This was based on the responses of 2,619 GPs and 3,018 specialists. They include salaried GPs, and specialists working in both the public and private sectors. Females comprised 44.4 per cent of GPs and 27.5 per cent of specialists. The average weekly hours worked were 39.4 for GPs and 45.1 for specialists, and both worked on average 51.6 weeks each year.

The ground-breaking paper - *What Factors Influence the Earnings of GPs and Medical Specialists in Australia?* - is based on analysis of data collected through a comprehensive national longitudinal survey of doctors called *Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life* (MABEL). Responses were received from 10,498 doctors. The Wave 1 of the MABEL survey was undertaken between June and December 2008, and the Wave 3 survey has just been sent out. Other results from MABEL are available on the website www.mabel.org.au.

The Melbourne Institute and Monash University study was undertaken to provide detailed empirical research on the factors that determine doctors' earnings because of the important role that earnings have in influencing the overall cost of health care, decisions on workforce participation and labour supply.

Other highlights of the study were that country doctors earned 11.5 per cent more than GPs in major cities, despite the fact that there was often a doctor shortage in those areas. It was also found that GPs on average earned 31.7 per cent less than specialists.

Professor Scott said that the shortage of country doctors was as much about retention as income levels. "We cannot say from this study how much it would take to keep doctors in outer regional, rural and remote areas because for some it wouldn't matter how much you paid them. They prefer to work in cities. There are a range of incentive schemes for doctors to work in rural areas, but not necessarily to keep them there for long periods."

With regards to the disparity between GPs and specialists, Professor Scott said that the issue of relative earnings was important. "We have a shortage of GPs, partly because doctors continue to choose to become specialists. The number of GP training places has recently been increased so it will be interesting to see whether these are filled given the size of the income differential."

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NOTE:

A copy of the *What Factors Influence the Earnings of GPs and Medical Specialists in Australia?* study is available at the [Melbourne Institute](#) website.