

Exploring the unexpected: insights from the AMSA National Convention 2026

Reading time:

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Date created: 02/10/2026

More than 900 medical students gathered in Adelaide in July for the 67th Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) National Convention, united by this year's theme, Explore the Unexpected. Through inspiring academic sessions, workshops and field trips, students explored how to handle clinical surprises, difficult conversations and situations they weren't trained for.

At the MIPS stand, we had the opportunity to speak with students from across Australia about their convention experience and invite them to complete a short survey. We asked what had made the biggest impression on them during the convention, where they saw their future careers heading, and what concerns they had about their studies and the challenges that lie beyond medical school. Their responses provided a fascinating snapshot of what matters most to Australia's future doctors.

What matters most to Australia's future doctors

Inspired by humanity

When asked which session had left the greatest impression, one presentation was a clear standout. It wasn't about new technology, or the latest medical advances. Instead, it was a deeply human story about delivering healthcare in extraordinary circumstances.

Dr Mohammed Mustafa's presentation on his experiences providing medical care in Gaza was consistently identified as a conference highlight.

Against the backdrop of an active conflict zone, Dr Mustafa shared the realities of caring for patients one of the world's most challenging and unpredictable environments. His presentation was a powerful reminder that while medicine demands clinical expertise, it also calls for resilience, compassion and the ability to adapt when faced with the unexpected.

Open to unexpected possibilities

Just as the conference encouraged students to explore the unexpected, many students were embracing the possibility that their future career may evolve in unexpected ways.

While some were drawn to specialties such as general practice, neurology, psychiatry and critical care, many were keeping an open mind.

Work-life balance emerged as a clear influence on career aspirations. For some students this was shaping an interest in specialties such as dermatology and radiology, which are seen as offering a better balance, while others said it had influenced their decision not to pursue surgery.

Navigating the unexpected

For many students, one of the biggest concerns wasn't passing exams, it was what comes next. Conversations at the MIPS stand highlighted growing awareness that the pathway from medical school to specialist practice is becoming increasingly complex.

The challenge of training bottlenecks and extended training periods was a common concern. A recent report has projected that the average transition rate from hospital prevocational group to registrar group will decline from 36% in 2024 to 15% by 2048, highlighting increased competition for specialist training positions and job uncertainty for junior doctors.¹

As Australia's medical workforce continues to evolve, remaining open to different career pathways and opportunities in areas of critical workforce need (e.g. rural and remote practice) may become an increasingly important part of a medical career.

Unexpected support

Unexpected support

One of the biggest surprises for many students wasn't clinical at all, it was learning more about professional indemnity.

Many students were unaware that MIPS membership remains at no cost until halfway through PGY3, while others didn't realise they could hold membership with more than one medical defence organisation.

It's a reminder of the importance of understanding the practical aspects of becoming a doctor early, so that when the unexpected does arise, you know where to turn for support.

For membership questions, claims support or professional guidance, call 1800 061 113 or email info@mips.com.au.

References

1. Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, 2026. Whole of Medical Workforce Supply and Demand Compendium Report. Available at: <https://hwd.health.gov.au/resources/primary/whole-of-medical-workforce-compendium-report-june-2026.pdf> (accessed August 2026).

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