There is an immediate and ongoing need to analyse the effectiveness of rural clinical placements in increasing rural career uptake and thus decreasing critical shortages in the rural workforce. Rural clinical placements provide valuable training and learning opportunities for medical students and it has been postulated that rural exposure is associated with an increased likelihood of working rurally in the future. Australian medical students are now required to complete four weeks of rural clinical school experience under the Rural Clinical Training and Support (RTSC) Program.

The Australian Medical Students’ Association (AMSA) recognises that rural clinical schools (RCS) provide a diverse range of incentives and supports to students undertaking rural clinical placements. The aim of this study was to ascertain the importance of incentives and supports for students undertaking rural placements, and to analyse the impact of student supports on intentions to work rurally. Through this analysis, we aimed to determine whether students who felt well supported during their rural placements were more likely to work rurally than students who did not.

As part of the 2012 FRAME survey, which students completing placements within rural clinical schools are invited to complete annually, additional questions have been integrated to investigate student opinion of the incentives and support they receive and how well supported they feel during their rural placements. Australian RCS students will be invited to complete a 20-minute online or paper-based survey between September 2012 and January 2013. The survey will also seek to identify associations between student demographics, career intent and student perceptions of support from their RCS.

It is expected that this study will make a valuable contribution to the literature assessing the impact of support and incentives on student experience of rural placements and intentions to practice rurally. It is hoped that the results of this study, which will be available in early 2013, will facilitate the enhancement of support and incentive strategies for students during RCS placements. This research is likely to generate discussion regarding how well-supported medical students feel while on rural placements and the impact of this on their intentions to work rurally. It will also provide an opportunity for strengths and weaknesses of current strategies to be identified and reflected upon. The outcomes of this research may indicate that continued assessment and analysis of the impact of supports and incentives on student experience of rural placements is warranted.