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Easing the Load: Part-Time Study Options for Australian Medical Students

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Australia's medical students face intense pressure, juggling rigorous studies, unpaid placements, and financial strain. A growing movement, led by voices like student Lisa Ross, is pushing for part-time study options to ease this burden and diversify the medical workforce. However, implementing such changes faces hurdles, including funding

models and government inaction, leaving students to navigate a system that often feels stacked against them.

The absence of part-time study in Australia's medical schools is a glaring oversight. As Lisa Ross, a mother and medical student, told ABC News, the full-time-only model excludes talented individuals with carer or financial responsibilities. A Deakin University survey revealed that 90% of Doctor of Medicine students reported financial precarity harming their learning and wellbeing, with 36% citing caregiving duties as a further strain. Part-time options could open doors for those unable to commit to full-time study, fostering a more inclusive medical workforce. Yet, universities like Deakin note that current Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) funding models penalize institutions for graduating fewer students if part-time study is allowed, creating a disincentive for change.

The Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA) and Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand (AUSNZ) argue that part-time study could address “placement poverty” and burnout. AMSA president Melody Ahfock emphasized to ABC News that flexible study would support disadvantaged students, aligning with the Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme's goals, which currently excludes medical students. This exclusion, despite medical students completing 2,000 hours of unpaid placements, feels like a deliberate snub from the Labor government, prioritizing other fields like nursing and teaching over medicine. Education Minister Jason Clare's refusal to comment on expanding the scheme only deepens skepticism about the government's commitment to supporting all students equally.

Without reform, the system risks losing talent to financial stress and burnout. Professor Carney, speaking to ABC News, urged collaboration

between universities and the government to ensure part-time study doesn't disrupt funding quotas. Until such changes are made, students face an uphill battle, forced to balance grueling schedules with part-time jobs or defer studies to survive. Offering part-time options isn't just about fairness—it's about building a resilient, diverse medical workforce for Australia's future.