

Communiqué

August 2017 meeting of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia

Introduction

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia (the Board) works in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) to implement the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme). Details about individual Board members can be found on the Board's [website](#).

The Board's most recent quarterly meeting was held on 22 August 2017, in Melbourne. The whole Board meets as the Registration and Notification Committee (RNC) almost monthly to consider registration and notification (complaint) matters.

We publish this communiqué on our website. Please forward it to your colleagues and employees who may be interested.

August meeting

During its meeting on 22 August, the Board received reports from the RNC. It also addressed a number of AHPRA and National Scheme-related matters.

Visit to Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)

The day before the August meeting, the Board members were fortunate to have been invited to tour the Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation in Collingwood, Melbourne. Our thanks go to VACCHO CEO Jill Gallagher AO for taking time out of her busy day to meet with the Board and discuss current issues, and also to Trevor Pearce for showing us around.

This proud and effective entity encompasses a number of member organisations from around Victoria (ACCHOs) which helps build community capacity for self-determination.

Co-Chairs announced to help lead the way for the first ever National Scheme Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health strategy

The National Scheme is pleased to announce the appointment of co-Chairs for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy group.

Associate Professor Gregory Phillips, CEO of ABSTARR Consulting and Dr Joanna Flynn AM, Chair of the Medical Board of Australia have been appointed as co-Chairs of the group.

The strategy group has been brought together to develop the National Scheme's first ever Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health strategy.

AHPRA, the 14 National Boards responsible for regulating the health professions, accreditation authorities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector leaders and organisations have committed to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health strategy with the vision of: *Patient safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's health system is the norm, as defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health strategy group publish communiqués of its work. These are available on the [Advisory group page](#) of the AHPRA website.

Registration data – statistics just released

The latest registration data has been published on the Board's [website](#). There are now 608 registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners across the Australia.

The Northern Territory accounts for 35% of the practitioners, followed by 20% in New South Wales. Western Australia and Queensland account for just less than 20% each, while South Australia has 7%, Victoria 2% and Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory account for less than 1% of registrants. 50-54 year olds account for the largest age group of practitioners across registrant base and the majority of registrants are female.

Learn more about the most recent statistics and the work of the Board on the [website](#).

National Boards approve policy for removing reprimands from the national register

A policy to ensure consistent removal of reprimands from the national *Register of practitioners* has been approved by all National Boards.

Reprimands on a practitioner's registration can be imposed under the National Law¹ by a performance or professional standards panel, professional standards committee (NSW), and a relevant tribunal or court.

The policy will ensure that reprimands are removed from the [national register](#) in a consistent and effective way. It also allows for the removal of reprimands imposed under previous legislation to be considered on an individual basis, consistent with removal powers under that legislation.

A reprimand imposed under the National Law will be removed from the national register on the publication end date set by the relevant panel, committee, court or tribunal. Where a panel or tribunal has not set a publication end date, or where the reprimand was imposed under previous legislation, the reprimand will be removed no earlier than five years from the date of initial publication.

This is subject to:

- the practitioner making an application for removal of the reprimand
- no relevant event having occurred in the five-year period of publication of the reprimand, and
- legal advice confirming the power to remove a reprimand imposed under previous legislation.

A relevant event is any health, performance or conduct notification, action taken against the practitioner in relation to an adverse disclosure on renewal of registration, new information returned on a criminal history check or a confirmed breach of restrictions. It also includes when action has been taken against a practitioner about their conduct, health or performance. New notifications, irrespective of whether action was taken, will also be taken into account if an application for removal of a reprimand is received after the five-year period of publication.

The policy will take effect from 2 October 2017 and will be reviewed annually. An application form for removal of a reprimand from the national register will be published under [Common forms](#) on the AHPRA website.

Review of registration standards

Once again, we report to you that the Board has completed the preliminary consultation phase of its review of registration standards in conjunction with the other National Boards that started under the National Scheme in 2012. The registration standards that are being reviewed are:

- professional indemnity insurance arrangements (PII)
- continuing professional development (CPD)
- recency of practice (RoP)

¹ Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

- English language skills, and
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander registration standard.

The next phase of the process is public consultation and we will seek the feedback of all interested parties, as well as those trusted stakeholders who gave us useful feedback during the preliminary consultation phase.

The Board is keen to get your feedback on the proposed draft changes to the registration standards (some changes are small, some are major).

In the meantime, the currently published registration standards remain in force.

Review of the Code of Conduct

The Board's *Code of conduct* (the Code) is also used by ten other National Boards (Chinese Medicine, Chiropractic, Dental, Medical Radiation Practice, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Osteopathy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Podiatry), with some minor profession-specific changes for some Boards.

The Code is a regulatory document that provides an overarching guide to support and inform good practice and to help practitioners, National Boards, employers, health care users and other stakeholders to understand what good practice involves. It seeks to help and support practitioners to deliver safe and effective health services in an ethical framework.

As the Code was last published in March 2014, the Board has started a scheduled review with other National Boards that use the Code, which will draw on best available research and data and involve additional stakeholder consultation and engagement.

The review is still at an early research phase. However, the Board is already considering how it can maximise opportunities for input when the consultation stage of the review starts. In addition to public consultation, the Board intends to use its website and social media to inform the profession of how it can contribute to the review.

The Board will highlight opportunities to be involved in upcoming communiqué and newsletters.

COAG Health Council meeting communiqué: progressing amendments to the National Law

The federal and state and territory health ministers met in Brisbane on 4 August 2017 at the [COAG Health Council](#) to discuss a range of national health issues. The meeting was chaired by the Victorian Minister for Health, the Hon. Jill Hennessy. AHPRA CEO Martin Fletcher attended the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council) meeting which brings together all health ministers throughout Australia to provide oversight for the work of the National Scheme. AHPRA and the National Boards provide a regular update to the Ministerial Council on our work.

The meeting included an agreement by health ministers to proceed with amendments to the National Law, to strengthen penalties for offences committed by people who hold themselves out to be a registered health practitioner, including those who use reserved professional titles or carry out restricted practices when not registered. Ministers also agreed to proceed with an amendment to introduce a custodial sentence with a maximum term of up to three years for these offences. These important reforms will be fast tracked to strengthen public protection under the National Law. Preparation will now begin on a draft amendment bill, with a view to being introduced to the Queensland Parliament in 2018.

Ministers also discussed mandatory reporting provisions for treating health practitioners, agreeing that protecting the public from harm is of paramount importance as is supporting practitioners to seek help and treatment for their health concerns, including for their mental health and wellbeing. It was agreed that the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council will recommend a nationally consistent approach to mandatory reporting exemptions for treating practitioners following a consultation process with consumer and practitioner groups. A proposal on mandatory reporting is expected to be considered at the November 2017 meeting of the COAG Health Council.

The Council produces a [communiqué](#) from its meeting which can be accessed on AHPRA's website.

Health practitioner regulation: Learn how you're protected

A new video and an accompanying infographic explain the Australia-wide scheme that is in place to protect members of the public.

Both resources are available on the [What we do](#) page of the AHPRA website or read the [news item](#) on the Board website for more information. The video can also be watched on AHPRA's [YouTube channel](#).

Employer obligations

If you employ registered health practitioners, you have an important obligation to ensure that they hold current registration and that you understand your mandatory notification requirements under the National Law.

AHPRA has published [resources](#) to help you understand and meet your obligations, which are designed to complement your recruitment requirements and processes. These materials state exactly what your obligations are and it is important that you are familiar with them.

Registration

Approved programs of study

There are now twelve programs of study that have been approved by the Board for the purposes of registration. More are coming on line as they are accredited and approved by the Board. The list of [approved programs of study](#) is published on the Board's website.

If you have any questions, please call the Board's Executive Officer, Jill Humphreys, on (03) 8708 9066.

Top tips for using the register

The [national register of practitioners](#) is core to all the work of the Board, as it provides up-to-date information about every registered health practitioner. To help the public and employers get the most out of the register, we have developed [these tips](#). In particular, the tips remind anyone responsible for recruiting health practitioners how to use the register to verify a practitioner's registration status.

Are your contact details up to date?

It's important to make sure that your contact details registered with AHPRA are up to date so you don't miss reminders to renew or important information from the Board. You can check your contact details via the [Login icon](#) at the top right of the AHPRA website.

Email accounts need to be set to receive communications from AHPRA and the Board to avoid misdirection to an account junk box.

If you cannot remember your user ID or password, contact us [online](#) or call 1300 419 495.

Security tip: keep your web browser updated

AHPRA and the National Boards have made changes to our websites to ensure your information is kept safe.

If you use Internet Explorer version 6 (or an older version) to view the Board's website and are experiencing difficulty accessing web pages and online services, the Board recommends you [upgrade to the newest version of Internet Explorer immediately](#). It is available for free from Microsoft.

If you are using a new version of Internet Explorer and are still having difficulty accessing our website please contact us to report your experience. Call **1300 419 495** Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm (Australian Eastern Standard Time).

Further information

The Board publishes a range of information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners on its [website](#). Practitioners are encouraged to refer to the site for news and updates on policies and guidelines affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island health practitioners.

For more information about registration, notifications or other matters relevant to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme please refer to the information published on www.ahpra.gov.au. Alternatively, contact AHPRA by an [online enquiry form](#) or phone 1300 419 495.

Follow AHPRA on social media

Connect with AHPRA on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#) to receive information about important topics for your profession and participate in the discussion.



Presiding member

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Bruce Davis for holding the position of Presiding member until 1 September this year. I have taken on the role until Health Ministers appoint a Chair.

Conclusion

We publish a range of information about registration and our expectations of registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners on our website at www.atsihealthpracticeboard.gov.au or www.ahpra.gov.au.

For more information or help with questions about your registration please send a web enquiry form or contact AHPRA on 1300 419 495.

Renee Owen

Presiding Member
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia

8 September 2017