

Professions Reference Group communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met by video conference on Wednesday 12 June 2024.

The CEO provided this update:

[Review of the NRAS announced by Health Chief Executives](#)

On 30 May 2024, former NSW Health Care Complaints Commissioner Sue Dawson was [formally announced](#) as the Independent Reviewer to lead the Review of the Regulatory Complexity of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the Complexity Review). The review had its genesis in 2023 media reports regarding the large number of regulatory decision-making bodies that deal with sexual misconduct by health practitioners. The review's scope has subsequently broadened and will identify areas of unnecessary complexity and recommend changes to improve regulatory outcomes. The full [Terms of Reference](#) provide further detail.

Ms Dawson has had early engagements with the National Scheme. She attended the Forum of NRAS Chairs on 3 May 2024 and went through the Terms of Reference and her planned approach to the review with National Board Chairs. She has also had a session with the Ahpra Board and several workshops with Ahpra executives and subject matter experts throughout May.

In discussions thus far, she has shown particular interest in the stewardship role Ahpra plays nationally, including examples of its leadership in cosmetic surgery reform, notifier/victim support and coordinated responses to emerging regulatory challenges such as medicinal cannabis. She has also been interested in learning about operational processes to help her gain an end-to-end understanding of how the National Scheme works. She has also expressed interest in identifying opportunities to make processes more nationally consistent.

A final report is expected to Health Ministers at the end of 2024, although Ms Dawson has advised of a possible extension until April 2025.

[Amendments to the National Law has passed in WA](#)

On 14 May 2024, the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Application Act 2024 (Western Australia) commenced. This means that protection of the title 'surgeon' and changes to the National Law that commenced in October 2022 and May 2023 elsewhere in the country are now operating in that WA. The final group of changes to the National Law will start nation-wide on a date to be agreed by Governments, and we expect that will be on 1 July 2024.

With Western Australia moving to an applied laws model (from having had corresponding legislation), we expect there will be greater national consistency and minimal delays when future changes are made to the National Law. Like South Australia and New South Wales, changes to the National Law in WA will not commence automatically – the changes will need to be tabled in the WA Parliament with no disallowance motion.

[Parental leave fee arrangements in the National Scheme](#)

Ahpra and the National Boards want to play our part in supporting parental leave across the registered health professions, while maintaining the ability of the National Scheme to regulate those professions to protect the public. We also need to maintain the capacity of the National Scheme to regulate those professions, noting we are a self-funded regulatory scheme.

We have established the Registration fee (parental leave) review to look at:

- The feasibility of offering a fee reduction or rebate for practitioners on parental leave within the National Scheme.

- Issues affecting practitioners returning to general or specialist registration from non-practising registration and opportunities to streamline their return to practice.

Regulatory Operations – verbal update

Registration update

After an extensive recruitment campaign, we are pleased to announce the appointment of Melinda Bailey to the role of National Director Registration.

There has been an increase in international registration applications primarily through Trans-Tasman recognition.

Notifications

Notifications are continuing to increase and there has been a subsequent increase in resourcing for this team. By streamlining and focusing resources we are keeping pace and meeting expectation to close 50% of notifications within 3 months and then six months in total for the remaining. Those notifications that are making their way through tribunal process will clearly take longer.

Closed loop prescribing/consumer driven demand

Learning from our experience with cosmetic surgery regulation, Ahpra has been developing our regulatory intelligence function from establishment in late 2023. Recent work has focussed on strengthening the governance structure for the program, prioritising issues for action and establishing operational capability to support a range of regulatory responses. Initial regulatory action has involved close engagement with other regulators and developing proactive communications and guidance for health practitioners practising in new business models.

Ahpra will establish a proof-of-concept Rapid Response Unit to better connect our regulatory intelligence with our response to individual practitioners who may not be meeting professional obligations. The unit will focus on consumer driven healthcare models where inappropriate professional conduct may not be notified to us. In doing so, the unit will seek to identify practitioners who may warrant closer scrutiny or investigation.

Expert Advisory Group on practitioner distress: Peer support for practitioners

The aim of the distress work is to understand distress in health practitioners undergoing a complaints process, recommend improvements and take actions.

The recommendations and actions include managing health concerns, supporting practitioners, being open, transparent and maintaining practitioner hope and learning from practitioner experience. One of the key recommendations is to work with external partners to develop tailored support from other practitioners who have been through the process. This will be actioned through encouraging and helping to co-design a peer support program, run by partners, linking practitioners who are involved in notification or monitoring and compliance with practitioners who have been through similar processes.

Members were provided with the opportunity to provide their professions' experience with using peer support. Members offered their insights into who is offering peer support for their practitioners involved in a regulatory process.