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# Ahpra

## **Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2019**

A Social Research Project

November 2019

Supplementary report prepared for:  
***The Optometry Board of Australia***

Truly<sup>®</sup>  
Deeply



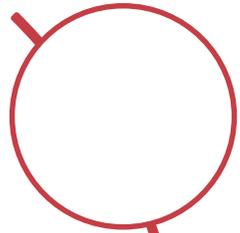
# Introduction

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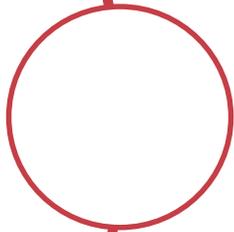
- Truly Deeply was first engaged in 2018 by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) to assess the perception and sentiment towards Ahpra and the National Boards.
- The review was intended to help National Boards and Ahpra better understand what stakeholders think and feel about the organisation and to identify how to facilitate ongoing confidence and trust in the work performed by Ahpra and the National Boards.
- The benchmark 2018 study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically extended interviews (face to face and via the telephone), focus groups and online surveys.
- Given the value of the insights delivered through the 2018 benchmark study to Ahpra and National Boards, the decision was taken to update the quantitative measures by conducting the online survey with practitioners and the general public in November 2019.
- A single, integrated report has been provided to Ahpra documenting the key themes and results.
- A separate summary has been provided for each of the National Boards based on the results of the online survey with practitioners.
- The purpose of this report is to present a subset of findings specifically for **the Optometry Board of Australia**.

# An overview of the methodology

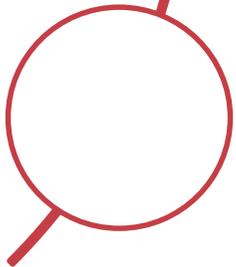
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A **two stage** approach using online surveys has been used.



**Stage 1** consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 15 registered professions. This survey was conducted between October 30-November 8, 2019.

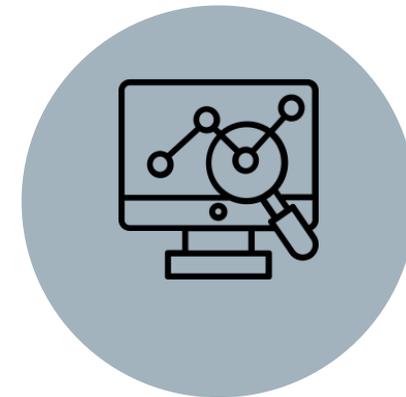


**Stage 2** consisted of an online survey with a representative sample of the Australian general public. This survey was conducted between November 1– 6, 2019.

# Quantitative approach

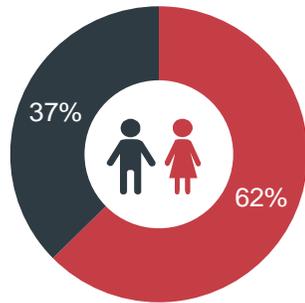
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community following the qualitative investigation.
- The 2019 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 questionnaires, with only a small number of additions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider. Quotas were placed on the sample for gender, age and location to ensure a nationally representative sample was achieved.
- Participants in the Practitioner Survey were sourced by Ahpra (using software that allowed the survey to be deployed to a random sample of practitioners in each profession).
- The practitioner sample has been weighted to ensure an equal ‘voice’ within the total sample of registered health practitioners (with the sample of ‘nurses’ and ‘midwives’ further separated). This has been done to ensure that the views of professions with larger numbers of practitioners do not outweigh the views of professions with much smaller numbers of practitioners.
- For comparison between the sub-analysis groups, chi square or independent tests were conducted as appropriate, with significant differences at the 95% confidence interval indicated where applicable.

|                               | Community Survey | Practitioner Survey |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Fieldwork dates</b>        | Nov 1-6          | Oct 30 to Nov 8     |
| <b>Responses</b>              | 2,048            | 5,944               |
| <b>Email invitations sent</b> | na               | 109,625             |
| <b>Response rate</b>          | na               | 5.4%                |

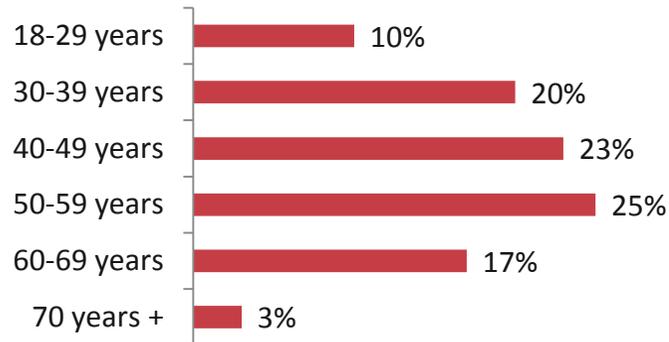


# 2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

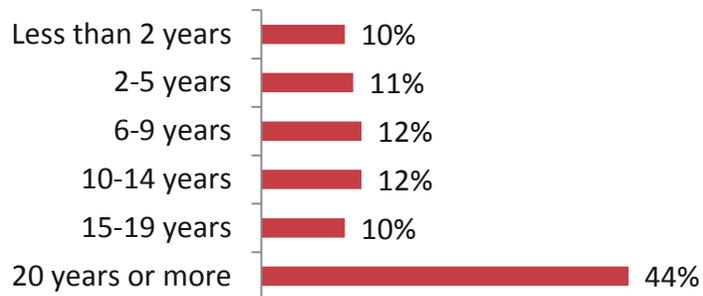
## Gender



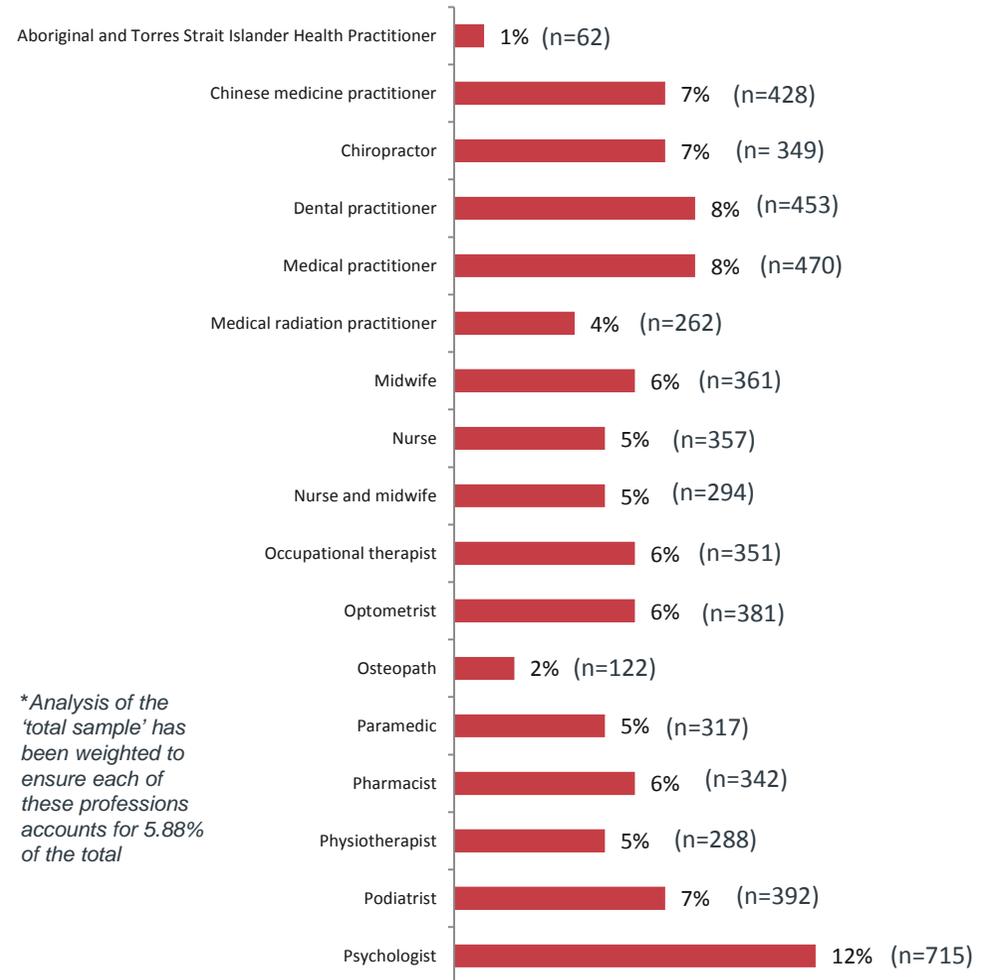
## Age



## Years in practice



## Practitioner type\*

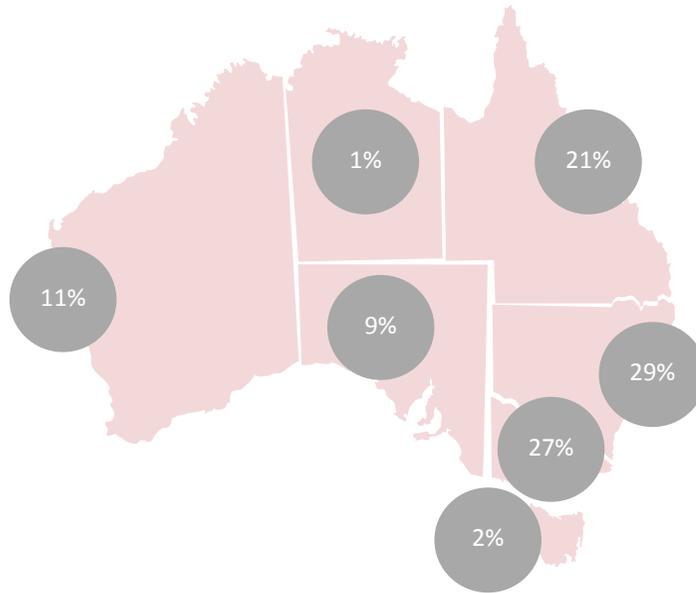


\*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

\* Figures may not add to 100%. Missing figures accounted for by 'prefer not to say'

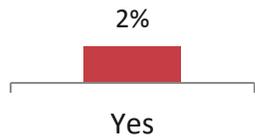
# 2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

## Location

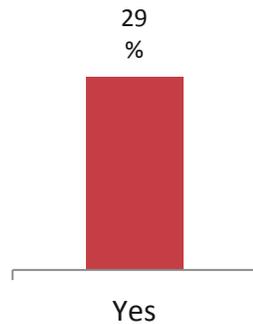


Metro: **64%**  
Regional: **36%**

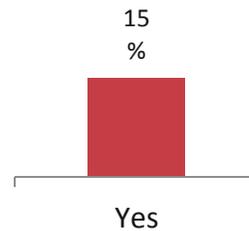
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



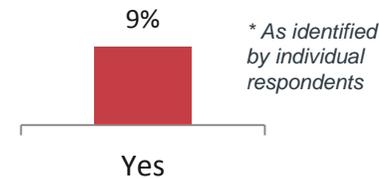
% who were born a country other than Australia



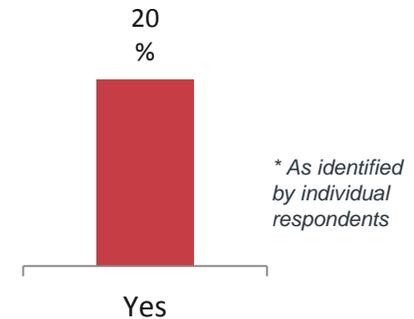
% who speak a language other than English at home



% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board\*



% who have been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards\*



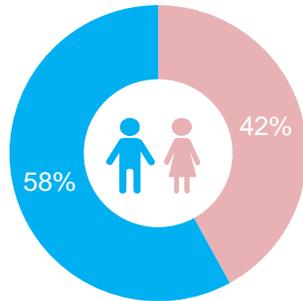
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Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners.

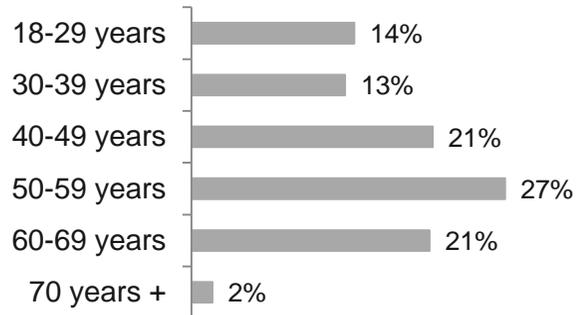
Specific insights into the responses from:  
**Optometrists**

# Sample of optometrists (n=381)

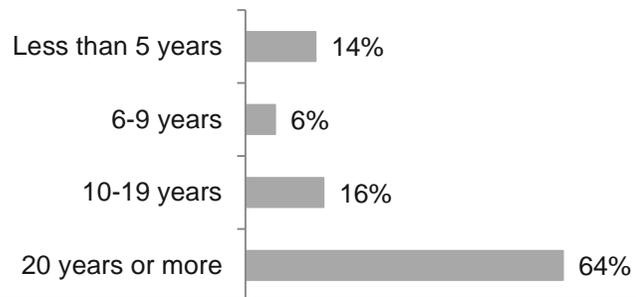
## Gender:



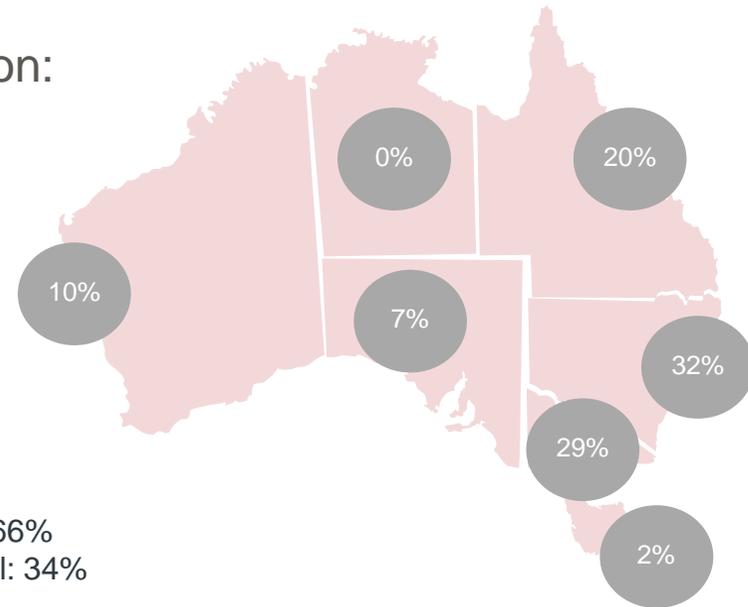
## Age:



## Years in practice:

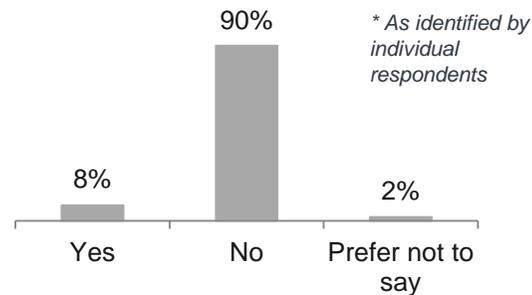


## Location:

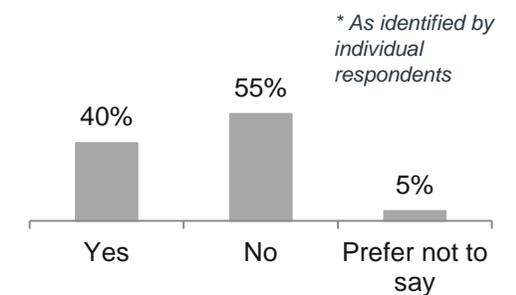


Metro: 66%  
Regional: 34%

% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board\*



% who have been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards\*



# 2019: Perceptions of the optometry profession among practitioners\*

(Top 20 Associations)

Q. Which of the following words do you strongly associate with **your profession**?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=381)

| Perceptions in 2019  | % of practitioners with that perception | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Professional</b>  | <b>57%</b>                              | <b>(+10%)</b>   |
| <b>Knowledgeable</b> | <b>43%</b>                              | <b>(+12%)</b>   |
| <b>Competent</b>     | <b>35%</b>                              | <b>(+13%)</b>   |
| Responsible          | 23%                                     | (+3%)   |
| <b>Caring</b>        | <b>20%</b>                              | <b>(-7%)</b>  |
| <b>Approachable</b>  | <b>20%</b>                              | <b>(+9%)</b>  |
| Trusted              | 20%                                     | (-2%)   |
| Respected            | 20%                                     | (+1%)   |
| <b>Hard working</b>  | <b>16%</b>                              | <b>(-14%)</b>   |
| Community minded     | 15%                                     | (+3%)   |

| Perceptions in 2019  | % of practitioners with that perception | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Reputable            | 14%                                     | (+4%)   |
| <b>Dedicated</b>     | <b>13%</b>                              | <b>(-8%)</b>  |
| <b>Empathetic</b>    | <b>12%</b>                              | <b>(-9%)</b>  |
| <b>Compassionate</b> | <b>12%</b>                              | <b>(-12%)</b>   |
| Committed            | 12%                                     | (-4%)   |
| <b>Friendly</b>      | <b>11%</b>                              | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| Honest               | 9%                                      | (-)   |
| Efficient            | 8%                                      | (+2%)   |
| Innovative           | 7%                                      | (+1%)   |
| <b>Passionate</b>    | <b>6%</b>                               | <b>(-7%)</b>  |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* than the average across all professions.

**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019* than the average across all professions.

\* *New question for 2019*

# 2019: Perceptions of the Optometry Board of Australia (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with the (National Board)?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=381)

| Perception in 2019 | % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Regulators         | 38%  | (-1%)   |
| Necessary          | 38%  | (+6%)   |
| For practitioners  | 36%  | (+4%)   |
| Administrators     | 35%  | (+1%)   |
| Bureaucratic       | 28%  | (+1%)   |
| Decision makers    | 25%  | (+1%)   |
| <b>Competent</b>   | <b>23%</b>   | <b>(+9%)</b>  |
| Advocates          | 21%  | (+4%)   |
| For the public     | 21%  | (-2%)   |
| Supportive         | 16%  | (+3%)   |

| Perception in 2019  | % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Shows leadership    | 16%  | (+3%)   |
| <b>Trustworthy</b>  | <b>15%</b>   | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| <b>Approachable</b> | <b>15%</b>   | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| Fair                | 13%  | (+2%)   |
| Helpful             | 13%  | (+2%)   |
| Out of touch        | 12%  | (-1%)   |
| Good communicators  | 11%  | (+1%)   |
| Accessible          | 10%  | (+1%)   |
| Honest              | 9%   | (+3%)   |
| Responsive          | 9%   | (-)   |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

## Summary of changes 2018-19:

# Perceptions of the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with the **(National Board)**?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

| % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | 2018<br>N=373 | 2019<br>N=381 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Regulators   | 34%           | 38%           |
| Necessary  | 36%           | 38%           |
| <b>For practitioners</b>                             | <b>43%</b>    | <b>36%</b>    |
| Administrators                                       | 36%           | 35%           |
| <b>Bureaucratic</b>                                  | <b>20%</b>    | <b>28%</b>    |
| Decision makers                                      | 27%           | 25%           |
| Competent  | 23%           | 23%           |
| Advocates  | 26%           | 21%           |
| For the public                                       | 21%           | 21%           |
| <b>Supportive</b>                                    | <b>23%</b>    | <b>16%</b>    |

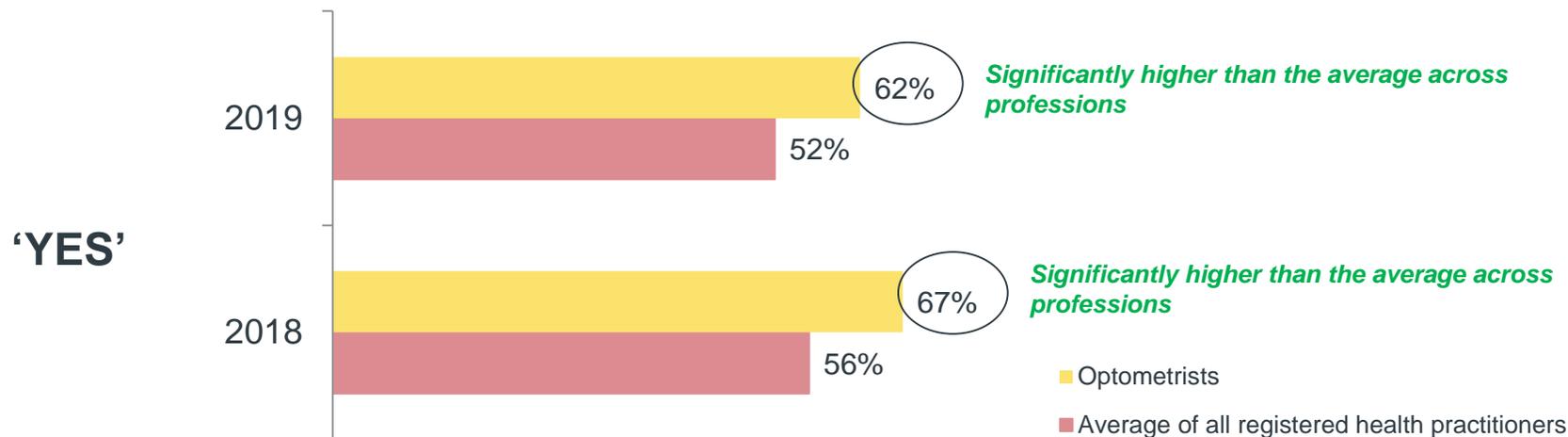
| % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | 2018<br>N=373 | 2019<br>N=381 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Shows leadership                                     | 16%           | 16%           |
| Trustworthy  | 20%           | 15%           |
| Approachable   | 18%           | 15%           |
| Fair   | 14%           | 13%           |
| Helpful  | 15%           | 13%           |
| Out of touch   | 10%           | 12%           |
| Good communicators                                   | 15%           | 11%           |
| <b>Accessible</b>                                    | <b>18%</b>    | <b>10%</b>    |
| Honest   | 12%           | 9%            |
| <b>Responsive</b>                                    | <b>14%</b>    | <b>9%</b>     |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

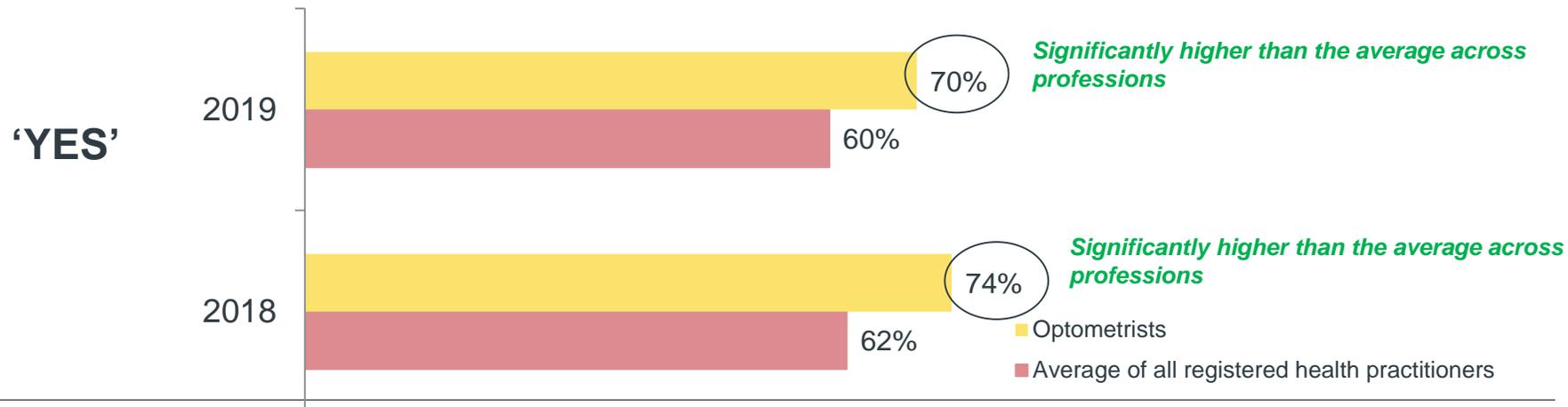
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*, compared with the 2018 result

# Levels of confidence and trust in the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Do you feel confident that your National Board is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust your National Board?



# What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Optometry Board of Australia

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## Indicators of trust: **70% trust the Board**

*They look after us, I get frequent emails from the State Board too, they respond when I have questions or concerns either by phone or email. In person is harder. They have a good reputation. I pay to be a member, so I expect to be looked after.*

*The brief communications I've had from them gives me the impression they are honest and wanting to further the responsibility of optometrists in eye care. They seem good at taking initiative and that seems like a trustworthy attribute.*

*It is a fair representation of most spheres of optometric practice and has a strong understanding of its role in public protection and growth of the profession.*

*They've made it clear that they are on our side and there to help us with whatever we need as practitioners.*

*I know they have been chosen for their professionalism and their dedication to the profession.*

*I feel that the members of the board are honest and knowledgeable.*

## Barriers to trust: **9% DO NOT trust the Board**

*They lack leadership, have forgotten good care comes from a strong profession and that optometry is independent of others and not subservient to ophthalmology.*

*Too much influence from large providers such as Specsavers. Very little consultation with independent optometrists.*

*They appear to have split loyalty to independent and franchised businesses.*

*I feel they do not have an adequate ear from the government to be able to work affectively for their members.*

*Not sure how they select board members, not convinced all board members suitably qualified to make the decisions they make.*

*They act without consultation on matters (e.g. Glaucoma management) which can harm existing relationships with medical practitioners.*

*They are aggressive and make decisions without consulting their members, only an elite bunch.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

# 2019: Perceptions of Ahpra among optometrists (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with Ahpra?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=381)

| Perception in 2019       | % of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Regulators               | 53%  | (-1%)   |
| Administrators           | 51%  | (+5%)   |
| Bureaucratic             | 42%  | (+3%)   |
| For the public           | 38%  | (+2%)   |
| Necessary                | 35%  | (-1%)   |
| Decision makers          | 20%  | (-1%)   |
| <b>For practitioners</b> | <b>20%</b>                                       | <b>(-7%)</b>  |
| Rigid                    | 17%  | (+1%)   |
| Controlling              | 16%  | (+1%)   |
| Competent                | 15%  | (+3%)   |

| Perception in 2019 | % of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Intimidating       | 14%  | (-1%)   |
| Fair               | 12%  | (+2%)   |
| Poor communicators | 12%  | (-3%)   |
| Trustworthy        | 10%  | (-%)  |
| Out of touch       | 10%  | (-4%)   |
| Aloof              | 8%   | (-%)  |
| Accessible         | 8%   | (-2%)   |
| Secretive          | 7%   | (-1%)   |
| Supportive         | 6%   | (-2%)   |
| <b>Advocates</b>   | <b>5%</b>  | <b>(-4%)</b>  |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

## Summary of changes 2018-19:

# Perceptions of Ahpra among optometrists

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with Ahpra?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

| % of practitioners with that perception of the Ahpra | 2018<br>N=373 | 2019<br>N=381 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Regulators   | 54%           | 53%           |
| Administrators                                       | 55%           | 51%           |
| Bureaucratic   | 43%           | 42%           |
| For the public                                       | 40%           | 38%           |
| Necessary  | 37%           | 35%           |
| <b>Decision makers</b>                               | <b>14%</b>    | <b>20%</b>    |
| For practitioners                                    | 23%           | 20%           |
| Rigid  | 17%           | 17%           |
| Controlling  | 14%           | 16%           |
| Competent  | 18%           | 15%           |

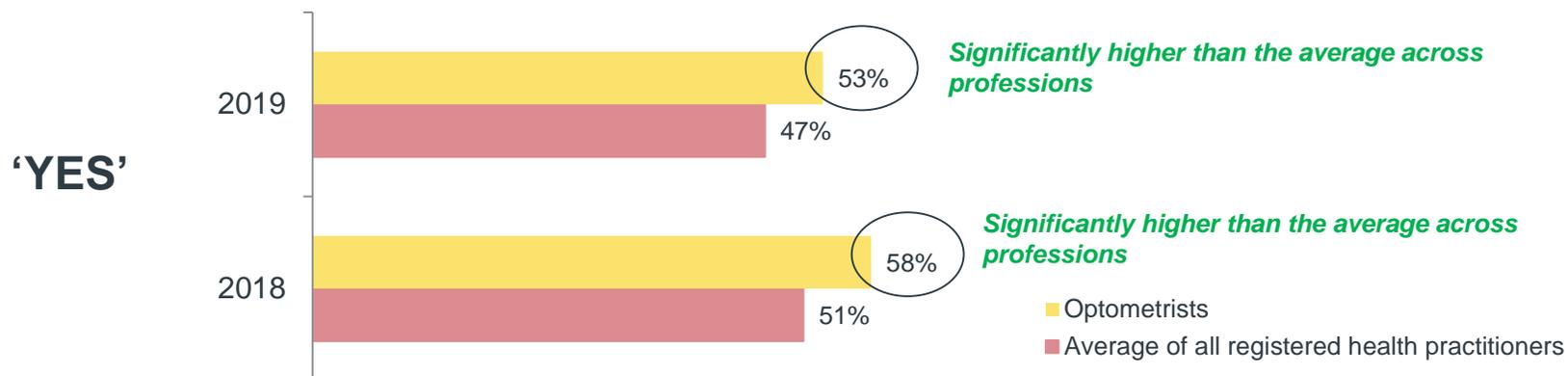
| % of practitioners with that perception of the Ahpra | 2018<br>N=373 | 2019<br>N=381 |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Intimidating   | 14%           | 14%           |
| Fair   | 12%           | 12%           |
| Poor communicators                                   | 9%            | 12%           |
| Trustworthy  | 11%           | 10%           |
| Out of touch   | 7%            | 10%           |
| Aloof  | 6%            | 8%            |
| Accessible   | 10%           | 8%            |
| Secretive  | 5%            | 7%            |
| Supportive   | 4%            | 6%            |
| Advocates  | 7%            | 5%            |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

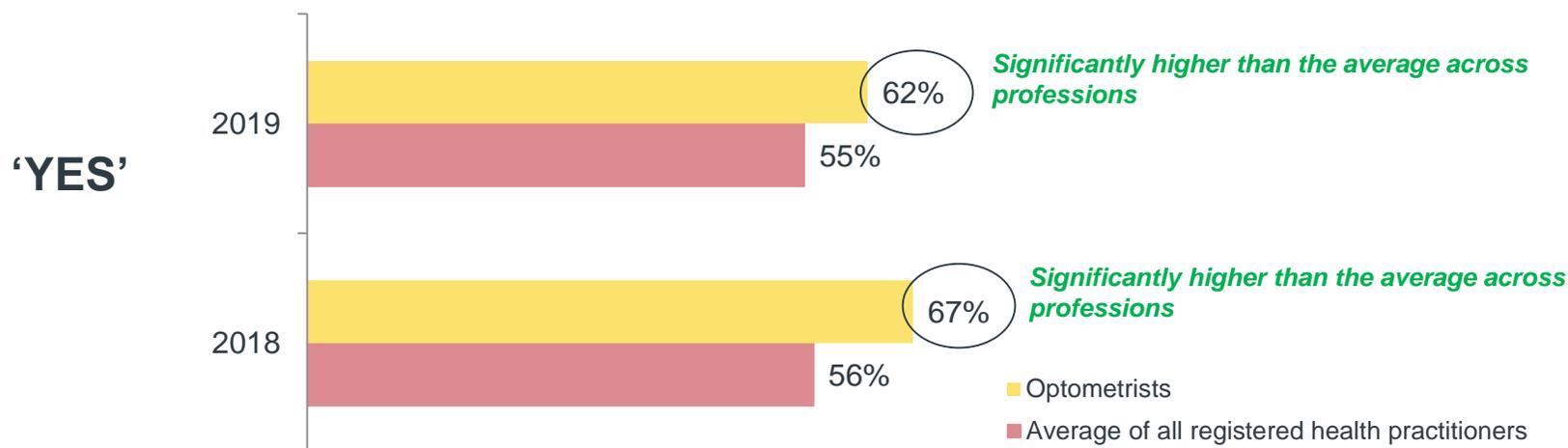
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*. compared with the 2018 result

# Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among optometrists

Q. Do you feel confident that **Ahpra** is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust **Ahpra**?



# What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in Ahpra among optometrists

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## Indicators of trust: **62% trust Ahpra**

*I have no reason not to trust them. I understand that they are doing a good job keeping optometry standards high. But I also don't have much dealing with them other than through paying annual fees and meeting CPD requirements.*

*The board of optometry works with them and I trust the board of optometry. Also it feels like they're the only body that does what it does, if I don't trust them, who else is there? I also pay a yearly fee, so I assume they are doing the right thing by us practitioners and our patients.*

*My contact with Ahpra seemed honest and transparent albeit somewhat administratively convoluted.*

*They have rules and regulations to ensure smooth functioning for the public and the health practitioners.*

*Many professionals and guidelines to keep people safe.*

*I trust in the need for what they have to do but whether they fully achieve their purpose I am not sure. We know there are shonky practitioners out there. I am not sure Ahpra is catching them all.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

## Barriers to trust: **14% DO NOT trust Ahpra**

*The fees to be registered as an optometrist tripled once Ahpra was created. I don't see any benefit in the existence of Ahpra. When I was audited regarding my CPD it took several months for an outcome. I have absolutely no positive impressions of Ahpra.*

*I have had too many dealings with incompetent Ahpra employees and ridiculous processes to trust Ahpra as a whole.*

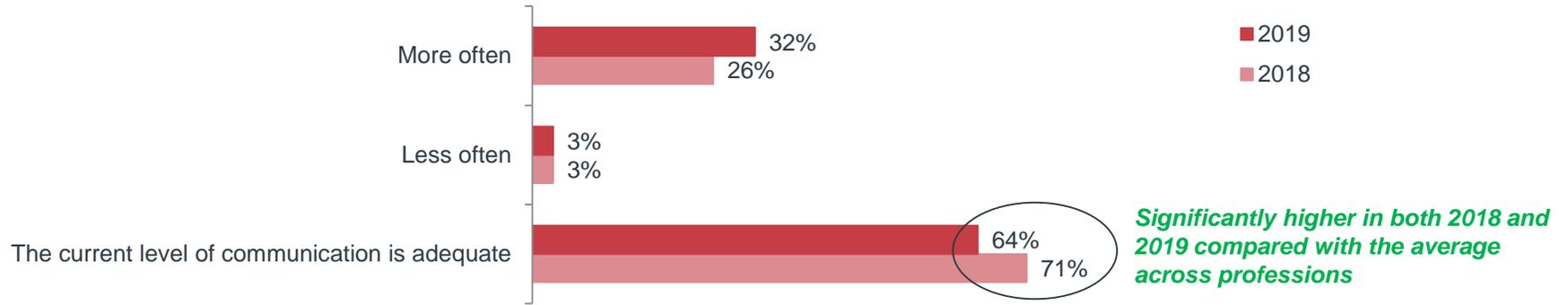
*They lack understanding in the unique specializations I am involved in.*

*While they are a necessary evil in order to protect the public from professional misconduct, I feel they represent the interests of the public only, and that the clinician is guilty until proven innocent, which is not always black and white, or easily defensible.*

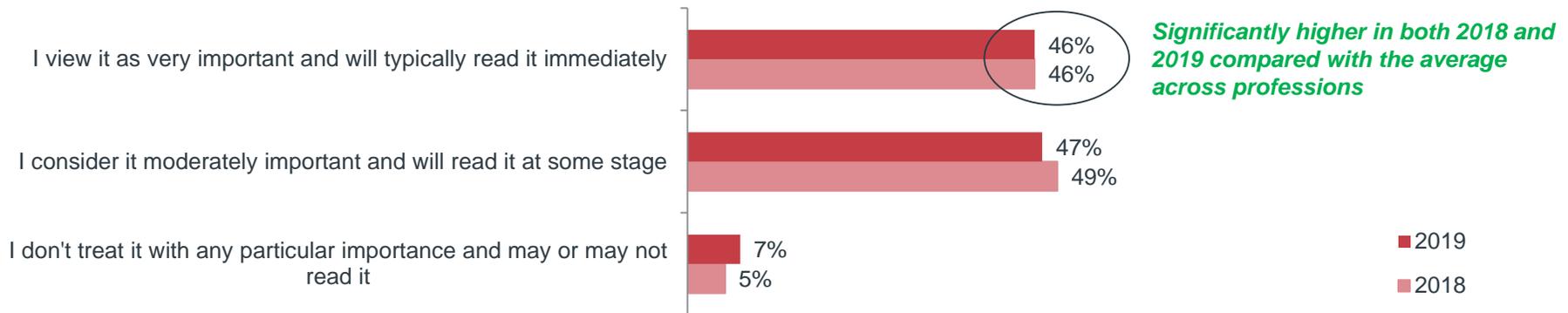
*Ahpra gives the impression of trying to make all healthcare providers the same, they suppress difference. Ahpra has no interest in optometry and how it can play a strong role in Australian society.*

# Response to communication by the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Would you like (National Board) to communicate with you.....?



Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

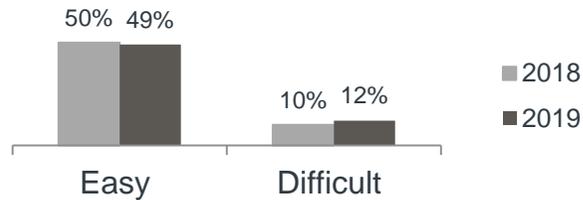
# Use of the Optometry Board of Australia website

Q. How often do you visit the website of (your National Board))?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this board

Q. How easy or difficult is it to find the information you were looking for on the (National Board) website?



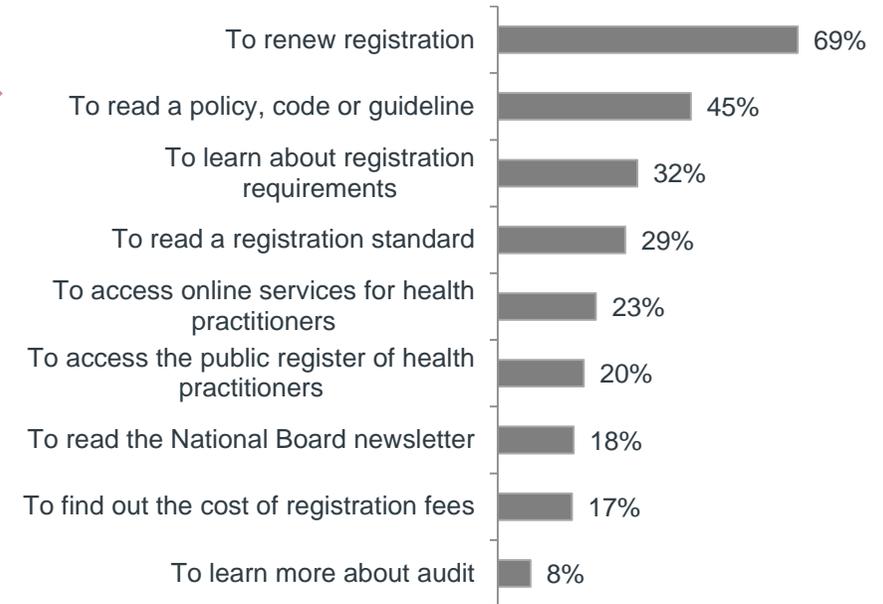
Base: Practitioners who have visited that board's website

Q. Is there any information you have looked for on the website of (National Board) but not been able to find?



Base: People who have visited that board's website

## 2019: Reasons for visiting the National Board website



## Additional information sought by practitioners included (but was not limited to)...

- *Optometry statistics e.g. number of optometry practices / given area.*
- *Who are the members on the Board, how long have they been practising and when will their term end?*
- *Legal type information. Specific legislations and it's impact on our profession.*
- *Policy related to renewal of CPR for registration.*

# Additional feedback from optometrists

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## **Sample of open-ended responses when invited to comment about overall perception of Ahpra and/or the National Board** *(full list of responses provided separately)*

*I feel less connected to the board since the newsletter has been electronic only - I used to read all the written info during lunchbreak but find it hard to find more time for electronic newsletters.*

*When they had the opportunity to improve the quality, accessibility and care for the public around Glaucoma they had RANZCO on the ropes they suddenly capitulated. A very poor outcome for the public. Safety is one issue but being progressive is just as important, this was capitulation to a self interest group.*

*Medicare fee structure is causing decreased quality of care. The board has not been able to control inappropriate advertising by some corporate practices which is demeaning and detrimental to independent practices working for quality of patient outcomes and care. The registration board should address all aspects of the profession it knows compromise quality of patient care which does not appear to be occurring from what I can see from the behaviour of most but not all corporate managed practices.*

*I have the impression the board and APHRA have lost control of the profession to big business interests to the detriment of the public and the future of the profession to be able to provide a reasonable level of independence in decision making for our patients.*

*Being able to receive definitive advice on interpretation of advertising guidelines e.g. the legality of Best of Three Optometrists in various localities rather than being advised to interpret them and face any consequences if wrong.*

*I think that Ahpra & the OBA are overly bureaucratic and make people feel like criminals even when they are not - the processes and systems are also onerous and cause stress for individuals - it has all become very PC and we are treated with suspicion - I realize there are standards and needs to protect the public but it can be done more compassionately.*

*I found Ahpra quite difficult to deal with a few years ago when I was audited . Not an easy process, although apparently it has improved . They were not understanding (I'd been in hospital ) and I'd been given the wrong information at one stage which meant I had to resubmit.*

*I am thoroughly sick and tired of having to comply with excessive CPD. It is very repetitive and inconvenient. There should be more face-to-face available online.*

*The professions should control registration, accreditation and standards with the administrative help of Ahpra, not the other way around. There should be continuous independent auditing of the National Scheme.*

