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Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

AHPRA REPORT

AHPRA Report Edition 1, March 2011

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Welcome to AHPRA Report



Welcome to the first edition of AHPRA Report! This is our new regular update to everyone interested in the work of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). A lot has happened since we started to implement the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) on 1 July 2010. Much has been achieved but there is still much more to do.

More than 525,000 health practitioners have transferred to the National Registers. All registered health practitioners are now able to register once and practise Australia-wide, within the scope of their registration. The online registers mean that, for the first time, practitioners, employers and the public have one place to check the registration status of health practitioners – transparently and easily.

Since 1 July, more than 344,000 health practitioners have renewed their registration successfully and more than 31,500 new health practitioners have been registered for the first time to practise in Australia across all 10 health professions. Detailed work is underway to support student registration and prepare for the registration renewals of around 300,000 health practitioners across Australia due in May and June 2011. More about the nuts and bolts of AHPRA in numbers is published here.

While early attention has been on registration issues, our notifications teams in each of our state and territory offices also continue to support the 10 National Boards in protecting the public. Our teams respond to concerns about registered health practitioners and, as necessary, manage investigations into their professional conduct, health and performance.

We are managing around 3,000 notifications, including those received since 1 July that are being managed under the provisions of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory and those matters that transferred into the National Scheme from previous state and territory boards being investigated under laws in place previously in each jurisdiction. AHPRA looks forward to publishing further information on notifications in the annual report of our first full year of operations later this year.

After eight months, the fundamentals of the National Scheme are in place. We also know that there are important areas of service delivery that AHPRA needs to improve quickly. In particular, when health practitioners have contacted AHPRA to ask questions about the new National Scheme, too many people have waited too long to speak with someone who could help and give them the answers needed.

We have made major progress in fixing the problems with our phone systems, including by boosting resources. Phone calls are now being dealt with directly by experienced staff in our state and territory offices wherever possible. We are improving our website so that the information needed by practitioners is much easier to find. We are also developing new online services including an application tracking system for health practitioners. »

More improvements are scheduled and you can find out more about what we are doing [here](#).

Mr Jim O'Dempsey is the latest addition to the [AHPRA senior team](#) as Director Business Improvement and Innovation, and will lead much of our national work on these service improvements, working closely with State and Territory Managers. Jim was most recently the State Manager of the AHPRA Queensland office and, before that, was CEO of various health practitioner registration boards in Queensland.

While we are doing everything we can to make things better right now, we are also investing in the future. Our Agency Management Committee and the National Health Practitioner Boards have signed off on a four-year [strategic plan](#). This articulates our vision of a flexible and competent health workforce that meets the current and future needs of the Australian community, and our mission to regulate health practitioners in Australia in the public interest.



More than ever, AHPRA is committed to working with our partners to deliver the benefits promised by the National Scheme to the Australian community, while improving our services to health practitioners. We look forward to working together with National Boards, governments, professional associations, consumer groups and others as we make the transition from a brand-new organisation, implementing a new National Law, to an established and respected Agency with patient safety at its heart.

Martin Fletcher
Chief Executive Officer

Student registration

March marks another milestone in the National Scheme with the registration of Australia's 100,000 students across nine of the 10 registered professions.

AHPRA is working directly with education providers to register students in the 2011 academic year. We are seeking lists of enrolled students from education providers to make sure this data transfer is smooth and has minimal impact on students.

Some students in some professions were registered before the National Scheme started. These students were transferred automatically to the National Scheme. Students who were not registered previously under state or territory legislation will be registered with the National Scheme from March 2011.

Student registration under the National Law is different from student registration in place in some states and territories before 1 July 2010. When shaping the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory, ministers were guided by the principle of public safety and determined that the impact of registration on students should be as limited as is necessary to achieve this.



The Boards' role in registering students is confined to registering students and dealing with notifications about students whose health is impaired to such a degree that there may be a risk to the public, or who have been found guilty of an offence punishable by 12 months' imprisonment or more. Any student who is registered and needs to advise AHPRA of either a criminal history or impairment issue can contact the [local AHPRA office](#), or seek the support of his or her education provider to do so.

Student registration does not replace the internal processes of education providers for dealing with disciplinary or academic progress issues. National Boards and AHPRA have no role to play in the academic progress or professional conduct (other than offences punishable by 12 months' imprisonment or more) of students. »

The student register is confidential. AHPRA cannot provide validation of student enrolment to health services that are not the education provider. Confirmation of a student's enrolment status remains a matter managed directly between employers and education providers.

Another new feature of the National Law is the need to register students undertaking clinical placements who are not enrolled in an approved program of study and who are not otherwise registered in the National Scheme. The definition of **education providers** is broad, and includes hospitals or health services providing clinical placements to these students. Information about specific arrangements for student registration in these cases is published on our [website](#).

The Psychology Board of Australia does not register students and is instead using provisional registration for this purpose.

Role of education providers

In states and territories where student registration differs substantially from arrangements in place before July 2010, the National Law brings new responsibilities for education providers in relation to student registration.

In essence, education providers must provide to AHPRA a list of all students enrolled currently in approved programs of study at the end of March 2011 and again after each academic census. AHPRA has provided a detailed request to make this data transfer as straightforward as possible. The National Law also requires education providers to notify AHPRA within 60 days when a student completes or ceases an approved program of study or clinical training.

AHPRA is communicating directly with education providers to support the reliable transfer of data. Detailed information and frequently asked questions about responsibilities for education providers is published on the [AHPRA website](#).

For further information, contact studentregistration@ahpra.gov.au.

AHPRA Facts

Sorting fact from fiction is a perennial challenge. Here are some AHPRA Facts that paint a picture of the early months of the National Scheme.

AHPRA in numbers

- There are more than 525,000 health practitioners from 10 professions registered under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme
- Establishing the National Registers for each profession, which are [published online](#), involved bringing more than 1.2 million data items from 85 different sources into one integrated IT system

Registration and renewals

- More than 344,000 health practitioners have renewed their registration successfully since 1 July 2010
- More than 31,500 health practitioners across the professions have registered successfully since 1 July 2010, meaning new practitioners delivering health services throughout Australia
- An average of 60% of practitioners have renewed their registration online successfully since 1 July 2010
- There have been 344,000 certificates of registration issued to health practitioners across Australia
- AHPRA is progressively moving all practitioners to common national renewal dates. These will be in place from 2012. Until then, registration due dates are being progressively realigned with these new dates. That means practitioners in some states and will renew for more or less than the usual 12 month cycle, to bring their renewal date into the new cycle. The registration fee for these practitioners will be adjusted pro-rata.



Lapsed registrants: the National Law

The consequences for practitioners who do not renew their registration by the expiry date have attracted considerable attention since the start of the National Scheme. The provisions in the National Law are not yet well understood by many practitioners and this has understandably caused some anxiety.

Under the National Law, health practitioners have one month after their registration expiry date when they remain registered and can continue to practise (within the scope of their registration). If they do not submit their renewal applications within this one-month late period, AHPRA and the National Boards have no option but to remove the practitioners from the National Register. This means that their registration lapses.

In this situation, AHPRA writes to the registrant to advise that he or she is no longer registered and is not able to practise. As required by law, AHPRA also provides to Medicare Australia the list of practitioners whose registration has lapsed. Medicare contacts practitioners whose patients are no longer entitled to rebates. A special AHPRA hotline has been set up for practitioners who need additional advice or information once they have been contacted by Medicare Australia.

The majority of practitioners whose registration lapses choose not to renew their registration. They may be opting out of practice (for example, retirement, family leave or other personal reasons) or may have opted to change their registration type as is now possible under the National Law (for example, moving to the non-practising category of registration). In some cases, registrants do forget to renew their registration, despite having been sent a reminder by AHPRA.

Fast-track applications

Practitioners whose registration has lapsed must, under the National Law, apply for registration again and meet the requirements of registration if they wish to stay in practice. Under the National Law, they are not able to simply renew once their registration has lapsed.

AHPRA has worked with each of the National Boards to establish a fast-track application process with no additional fees in the first phase of the National Scheme, for registrants whose registration has lapsed but who wish to remain in practice. This fast-track process is open for one month after the end of the late period.

The fast-track process does not require proof of identity; does not require verification of qualifications (if this was recorded as part of previous registration); does not require verification of English language skills; and does not require registration history or work history. The process does require practitioners to make declarations about their continuing professional development and criminal history.

These applications are usually processed within 48-72 hours, unless the practitioner has made an adverse criminal history declaration. In these circumstances, we believe it is in the public interest for AHPRA to take no shortcuts and to complete the criminal history review process, even when this may extend the processing time beyond 48-72 hours.

To make application using the fast-track process, practitioners can access the [AHPRA website](#) 'fast-track application'. This is only open for practitioners whose registration lapsed because they did not renew on time. It is not available to practitioners who have not previously been registered.

Service improvements

While the fundamentals of the National Scheme are in place, we recognise there are areas of service delivery that we need to strengthen quickly. While many practitioners may not have been affected directly, they may well have heard something from others and wondered what's been going on.

Our aim is to provide all health practitioners with a responsive and professional experience when registering and renewing their registration. We aim to simplify, streamline and speed up our services wherever possible.



What we are doing now

- immediate improvements to phone and email response systems across the AHPRA State and Territory office network; phone calls are now being dealt with directly by experienced staff in our State and Territory offices wherever possible
- changes to the AHPRA website to make it easier to use, aimed at streamlining, simplifying and supporting the basic processes of registration and renewal
- developing new online services such as tracking application/renewal status and graduate application processes to be ready by the middle of 2011 and
- increasing the number of practitioners who renew online. We are encouraged that, in the last round of renewals, more than 60% of practitioners renewed online. Our goal is to increase this further.

Current services

Already, there are a number of online services available:

- health practitioners can renew their registration, update their contact details and check their renewal application has been received online – and continue to practise while that application is being processed
- employers can 'bulk-check' the registration status of their employees and support them in renewing their registration on time
- the public, practitioners and employers can check registration details of individual practitioners on the National Register which provides information about areas of specialty/endorsement, registration expiry dates or registration types
- employers can use the National Register to confirm an individual's ability to practise in a regulated health profession in Australia; if a practitioner appears on the National Register, he or she may practise in that profession in Australia within the scope of their registration
- a wide range of forms is available online to support requests for certificates of registration status, advice on standard curriculum vitae format required for registration applications and other forms used by each profession; in a new project, forms are being simplified and new forms added progressively and
- online enquiries are streamlined through an online enquiry form with drop-down, automated topic selections to match the most frequent content requests, like reminders about user ID and passcode, questions about application status and fast-track applications for practitioners whose registration has lapsed.

Scheduled improvements

- updated website for cleaner, simpler information
- pop out wallet sized registration cards for all practitioners when they renew
- communications campaign to support May and June renewals and
- online applications for new graduates.

Watch this space for more detail...

Renew online, on time

AHPRA is now gearing up for the next major registration renewal phase, when close to 300,000 health practitioners across Australia are due to renew their registration in May and June 2011. The majority of these renewals are for nurses and midwives. A number of other professions in different states and territories, including medical practitioners in Queensland, are also due to renew registration in the next few months.

Under the National Scheme, AHPRA is changing the registration renewal dates for health practitioners to create nationally consistent dates.

From 2012, all nurses and midwives with general registration will be due to renew by 31 May; all medical practitioners with general and specialist registration will be due to renew by 30 September; and all other health professions with general and specialist registration will be due to renew by 30 November. 2011 marks the transition to these new national dates. The length of the registration period and the fees will be adjusted accordingly.

At a time of change, it is important that affected health practitioners understand these changes and what it means for them. While it is up to practitioners to renew their registration, it is up to AHPRA to make that process as clear and efficient as possible. AHPRA is working with employers, professional associations and health departments to encourage all practitioners, who want to continue to practise, renew online, on time.



There are four steps we want practitioners to take:

1 Know your registration expiry date

Health practitioners can check the online National Register at www.ahpra.gov.au. Look out for your renewal letter or email from AHPRA about eight weeks before you are due to renew.

2 Get in line for reminders

Make sure AHPRA has your email address and mobile telephone number so you can receive email reminders and we can contact you directly. If you have your AHPRA user ID and pass code, go online at www.ahpra.gov.au, click *Online services* and follow the prompts to update your contact details.

If you do not yet have your user ID, complete an [online enquiry form](#). Select user ID as the enquiry type.

3 Check and correct your contact details

Check your contact details through [online services](#) to make sure AHPRA letters and reminders will find you.

4 Renew online, on time

The easiest way to renew your registration is online. Make sure you renew on time because, under the National Law, there is no option for AHPRA or a National Board to renew your registration after the end of the late period without a new application.

Advice and information

Information online

You can visit our [website](#) or access advice through our [online enquiry form](#) or call our [enquiry centres](#) based in each State and Territory office. Our website is a great place to start when you are looking for information on many different questions about the National Scheme.

Email advice

Submit an [online enquiry form](#) any time and we will get back to you as soon as possible. There are categories of enquiries to select, reflecting the most common information requests, including getting your user ID and pass code reissued, or checking your application status.

Phone

Our team in each of our [state and territory offices](#) have a detailed knowledge and understanding of our rules, standards, guidance and advice. Call 1300 419 495 between 09:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday.

State and Territory offices

AHPRA has an office in each capital city. Contact details are published on our [website](#).

Publications and other information

National Boards produce registration standards, along with guidance and advice that expand on these standards, to support your professional practice. We publish detailed information on the National Board websites about maintaining your registration and a wide range of general news and information relevant to health practitioners. You can access all publications through our [website](#) which provides a portal to the websites of the National Boards.

Agency Management Committee

The Agency Management Committee oversees the work of AHPRA and makes final decisions about our policies. The Agency Management Committee ensures AHPRA functions properly, effectively and efficiently working in partnership with the National Health Practitioner Boards. In the spirit of transparency and accountability that underpins the National Law, the minutes of their regular meetings are [published online](#). Learn more about the [Agency Management Committee](#).

Think before you print

Any comments?

If you have any comments about this report, please [email us](#).

Further information can be found on the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency website at www.ahpra.gov.au.

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

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