

Ahpra

Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2020

A Social Research Project

November 2020

Supplementary report prepared for:

The Physiotherapy Board of Australia

Truly Deeply

Introduction

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 them and to identify how to facilitate ongoing confidence and trust in the work performed by Ahpra and the National Boards.

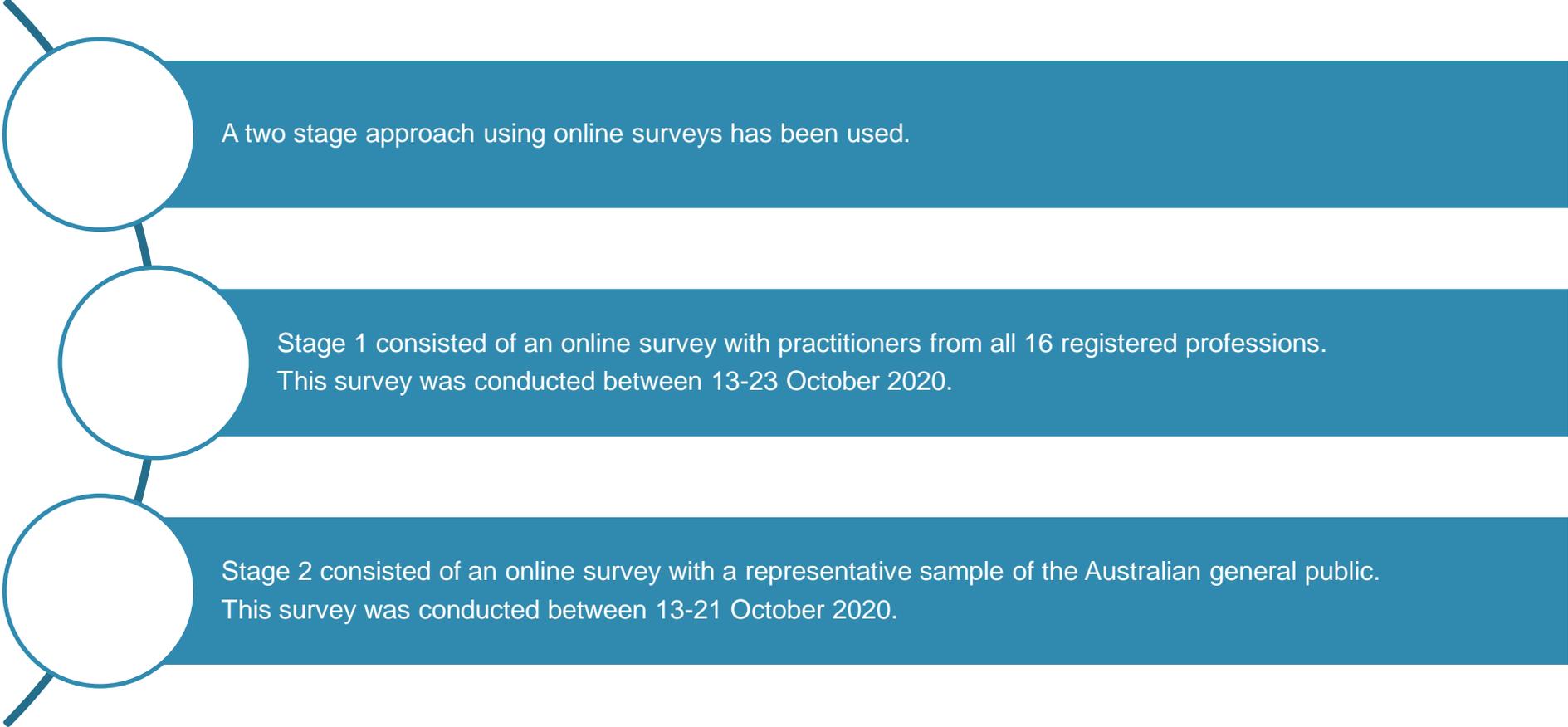
The benchmark 2018 study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically extended interviews (face-to-face and via the telephone), focus groups and online surveys.

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 and most recently in October 2020.

The purpose of this report is to present, discuss and consolidate the findings and insights from the 2020 surveys and to make comparisons, where appropriate, with the 2018 and 2019 results.

- 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 **Physiotherapy Board of Australia**.

An overview of the methodology



A two stage approach using online surveys has been used.

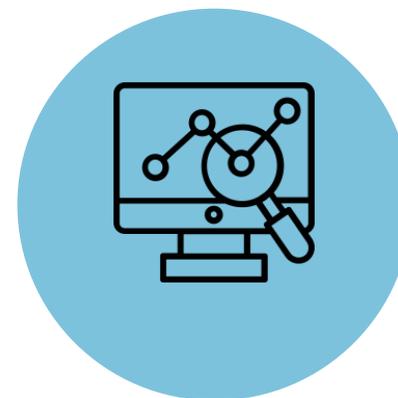
Stage 1 consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 16 registered professions.
This survey was conducted between 13-23 October 2020.

Stage 2 consisted of an online survey with a representative sample of the Australian general public.
This survey was conducted between 13-21 October 2020.

Quantitative approach

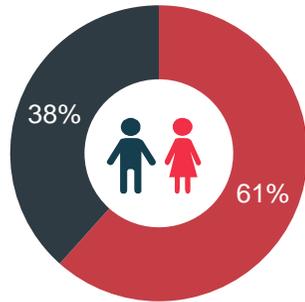
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community.
- The 2020 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 and 2019 questionnaires, with two additional questions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider. Quotas were placed 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
Fieldwork dates	13-21 October	13-23 October
Responses	2,020	10,228
Email invitations sent	na	138,453
Response rate	na	7.4%

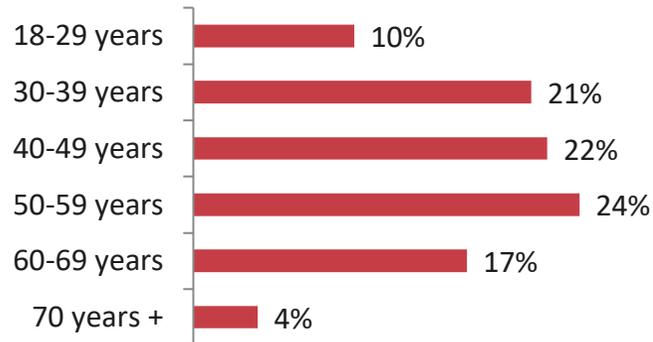


2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

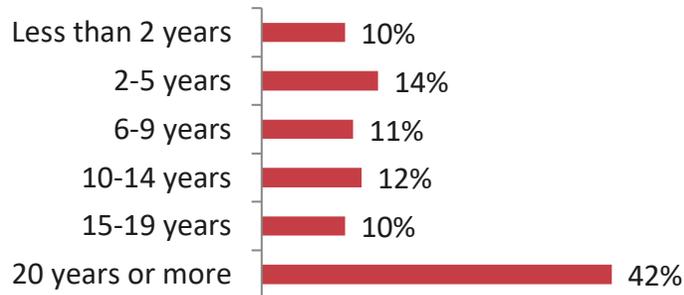
Gender



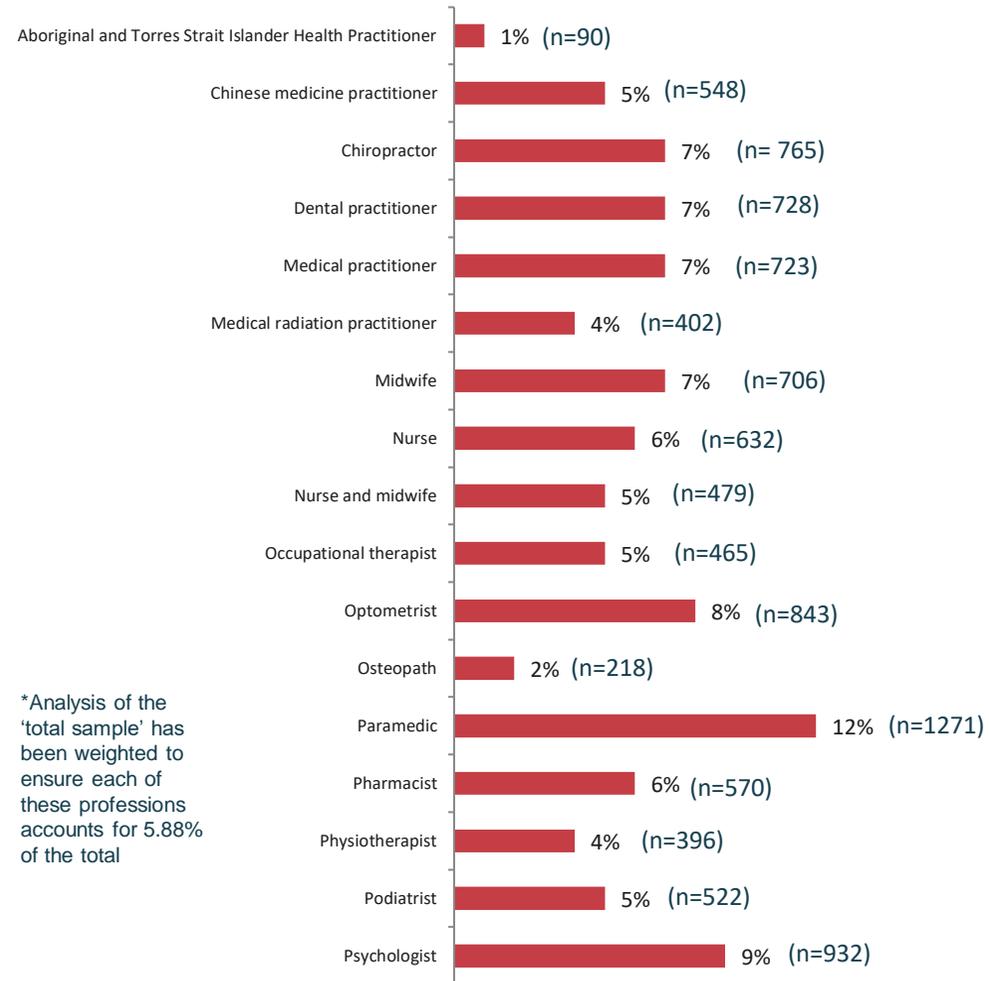
Age



Years in practice



Practitioner type*

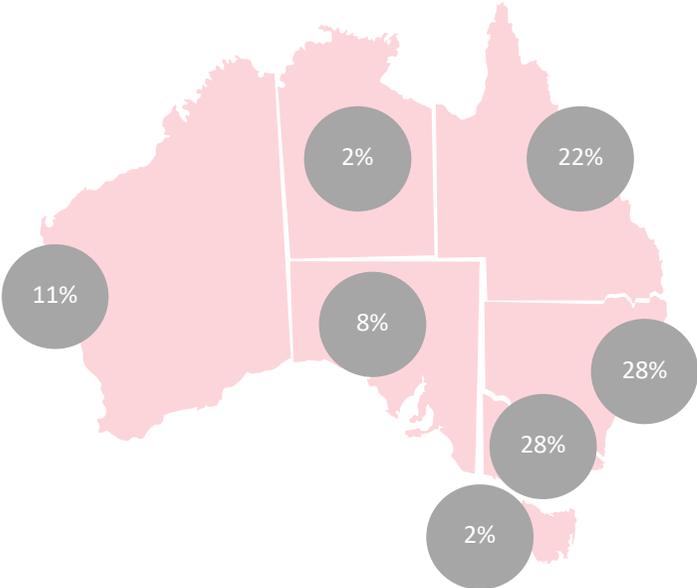


*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

Location

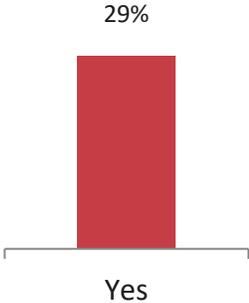


Metro: **63%**
Regional: **30%**
Rural: **7%**

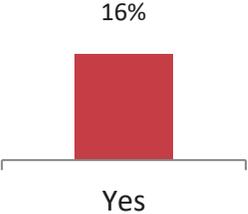
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



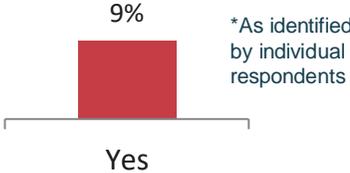
% who were born in a country other than Australia



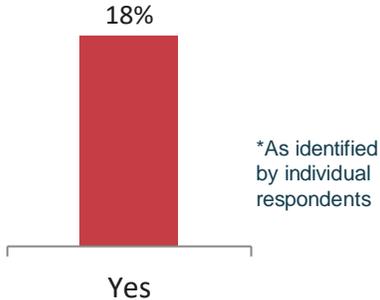
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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*

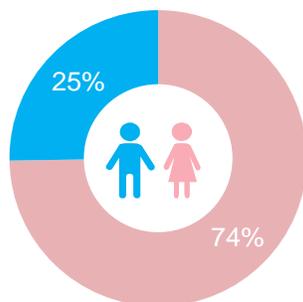


Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners

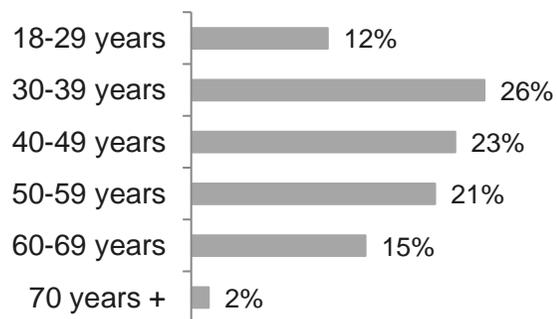
Specific insights into the responses from:
Physiotherapists

Sample of physiotherapists (n=396)

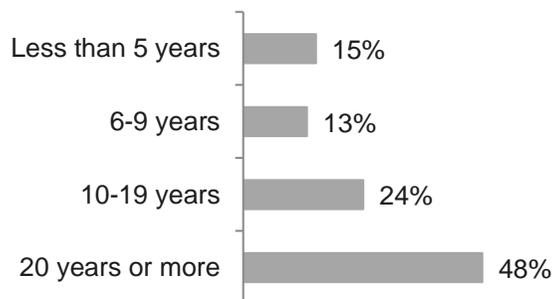
Gender:



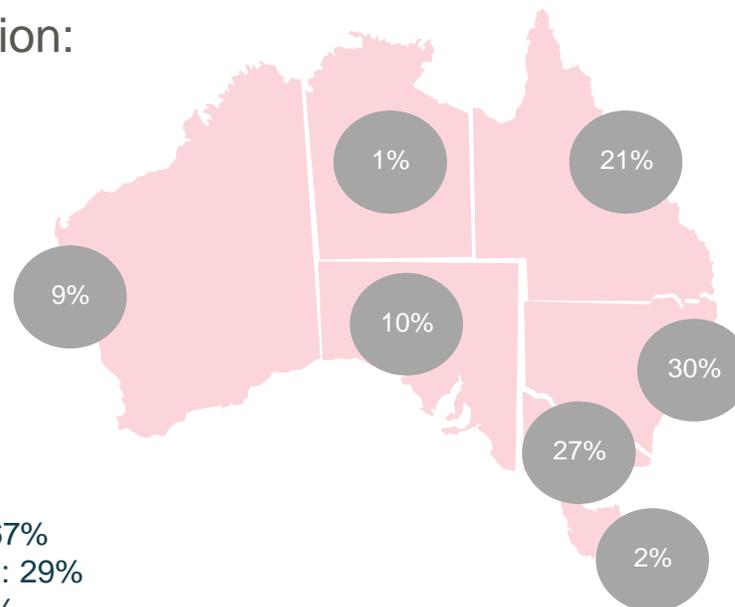
Age:



Years in practice:

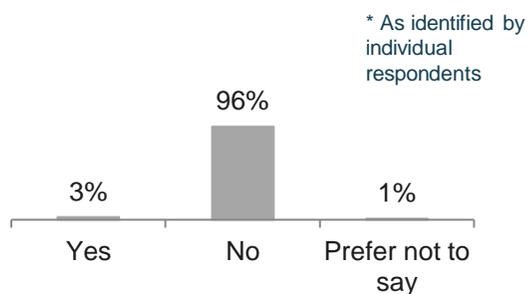


Location:

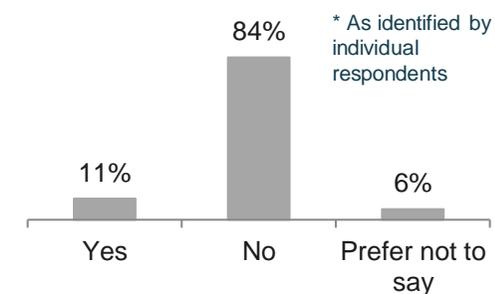


Metro: 67%
Regional: 29%
Rural: 5%

% 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*



2020: Perceptions of the physiotherapy 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=396)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	62%	(+16%)
Knowledgeable	47%	(+17%)
Respected	30%	(+10%)
Trusted	29%	(+5%)
Caring	25%	(-2%)
Competent	23%	(+3%)
Hard working	22%	(-6%)
Reputable	20%	(+10%)
Dedicated	18%	(-3%)
Compassionate	17%	(-6%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Empathetic	16%	(-4%)
Responsible	16%	(-3%)
Passionate	12%	(-2%)
Committed	12%	(-5%)
Approachable	11%	(-1%)
Innovative	11%	(+4%)
Team oriented	10%	(+1%)
Community minded	9%	(-6%)
Independent	8%	(-)
Friendly	7%	(-)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2019-20:

Perceptions of the physiotherapy profession among practitioners

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

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=288	2020 N=396
Professional	62%	62%
Knowledgeable	44%	47%
Respected	34%	30%
Trusted	22%	29%
Caring	19%	25%
Competent	27%	23%
Hard working	24%	22%
Reputable	21%	20%
Dedicated	20%	18%
Compassionate	20%	17%

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=288	2020 N=396
Empathetic	18%	16%
Responsible	22%	16%
Passionate	14%	12%
Committed	12%	12%
Approachable	12%	11%
Innovative	12%	11%
Team oriented	10%	10%
Community minded	9%	9%
Independent	4%	8%
Friendly	5%	7%

Green indicates a result significantly higher result in 2020 compared with the 2019 result.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower result in 2020 compared with the 2019 result.

2020: Perceptions of the Physiotherapy 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=396)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	40%	(+3%)
For practitioners	39%	(+8%)
Necessary	35%	(+4%)
Administrators	33%	(+1%)
Decision-makers	28%	(+6%)
Advocates	26%	(+8%)
For the public	20%	(-)
Bureaucratic	19%	(-6%)
Competent	19%	(+3%)
Shows leadership	14%	(+1%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Supportive	13%	(-1%)
Trustworthy	13%	(+1%)
Approachable	11%	(-)
Accessible	10%	(-)
Fair	9%	(-1%)
Helpful	9%	(-2%)
Responsive	9%	(-)
Good communicators	9%	(-2%)
Transparent	7%	(+1%)
Rigid	7%	(-2%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-20: Perceptions of the Physiotherapy 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 N=380	2019 N=288	2020 N=396	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=380	2019 N=288	2020 N=396
Regulators	34%	42%	40%	Supportive	12%	11%	13%
For practitioners	44%	38%	39%	Trustworthy	15%	13%	13%
Necessary	39%	37%	35%	Approachable	10%	9%	11%
Administrators	37%	34%	33%	Accessible	13%	7%	10%
Decision-makers	31%	25%	28%	Fair	12%	11%	9%
Advocates	24%	26%	26%	Helpful	10%	10%	9%
For the public	20%	15%	20%	Responsive	10%	9%	9%
Bureaucratic	20%	15%	19%	Good communicators	13%	9%	9%
Competent	22%	19%	19%	Transparent	9%	5%	7%
Shows leadership	17%	13%	14%	Rigid	7%	4%	7%

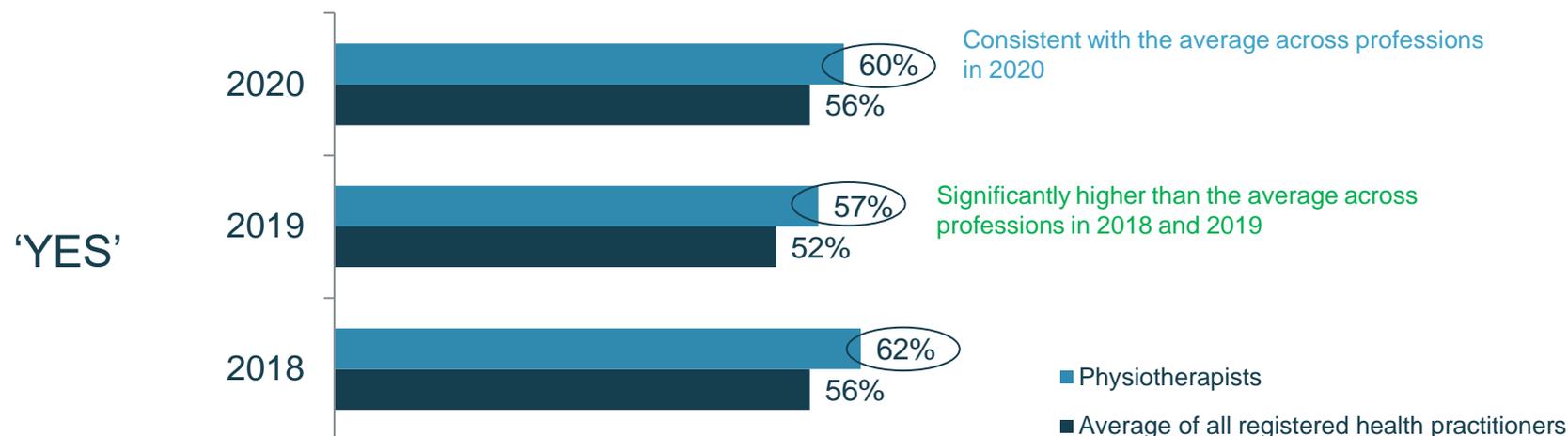
Green indicates a result significantly higher compared with the previous year.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year.

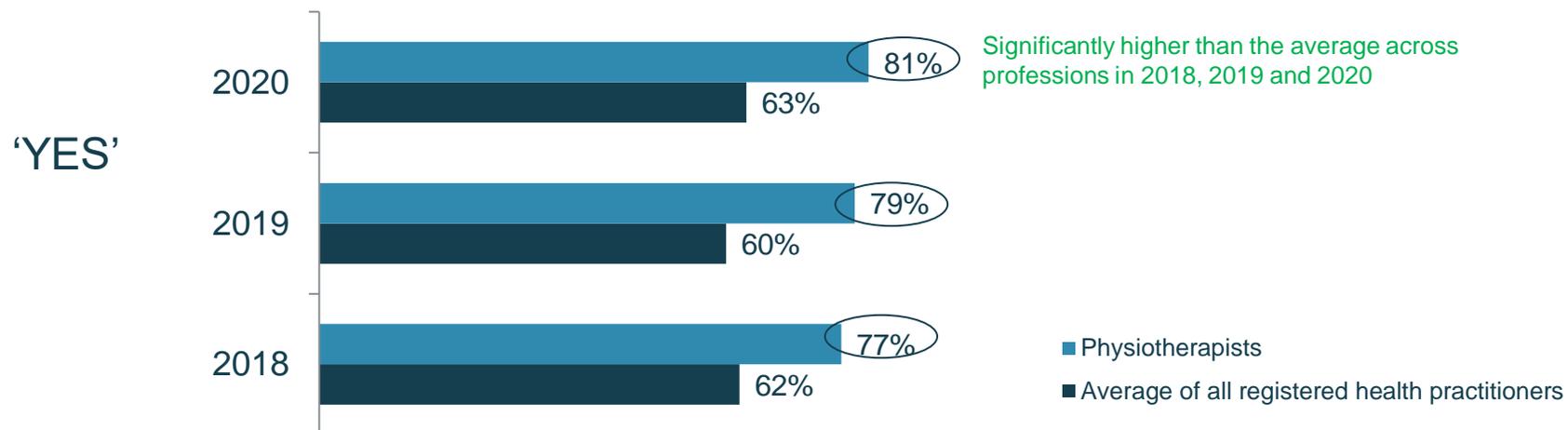
Note: There have been no significant changes in perceptions of the Board among physiotherapists between 2019-2020.

Levels of confidence and trust in the Physiotherapy 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 Physiotherapy Board of Australia

Indicators of trust: **81% trust the Board**

They are regulating the practitioners and will take action against any wrongdoing in the profession.

Its my regulatory board, its responsible for upholding standards in my profession which helps develop our skills as a group of professionals and protects us and the public.

Haven't been given a reason not to trust them.

I feel that they are committed to the safety of the public at the hand of physiotherapists in Australia.

It appears to be a very professional body and I've just always felt that any physiotherapy organization is trustworthy.

Honestly though, I never really even think about the board or Ahpra until I need to register every year.

They appear to be keeping practitioners honest and reprimanding when necessary.

I have never had or heard of any issues or complaints regarding the physio board. I think they perform their role really well in the background.

Advocates for the profession and ensures high standards of practice.

They act like the police of the profession.

Barriers to trust: **6% DO NOT trust the Board**

Out of touch and unable to make any change.

No idea what they do or their purpose. Very disappointed with their COVID-19 information and response.

I feel that the standard of physiotherapy courses being approved as meeting requirements for registration is becoming much lower. I believe the board is responsible for evaluating courses and credentialing them against the standard required to meet registration requirements at course completion.

You never hear about them or see them. Hard to know exactly what they do with their time.

Full list of responses provided separately

2020: Perceptions of Ahpra among physiotherapists (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=396)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	59%	(+6%)
Administrators	52%	(+8%)
Necessary	46%	(+10%)
For the public	36%	(+3%)
For practitioners	34%	(+6%)
Decision-makers	28%	(+5%)
Bureaucratic	27%	(-9%)
Competent	16%	(+4%)
Advocates	15%	(+5%)
Fair	13%	(+3%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Rigid	11%	(-3%)
Trustworthy	11%	(+2%)
Accessible	10%	(-)
Responsive	9%	(+1%)
Shows leadership	8%	(+1%)
Controlling	8%	(-6%)
Poor communicators	8%	(-5%)
Transparent	7%	(+1%)
Intimidating	7%	(-8%)
Good communicators	7%	(-)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-20:

Perceptions of Ahpra among physiotherapists

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 Ahpra	2018 N=380	2019 N=288	2020 N=396
Regulators	59%	60%	59%
Administrators	58%	54%	52%
Necessary	51%	48%	46%
For the public	43%	38%	36%
For practitioners	35%	35%	34%
Decision-makers	24%	19%	28%
Bureaucratic	32%	29%	27%
Competent	22%	18%	16%
Advocates	11%	12%	15%
Fair	11%	11%	13%

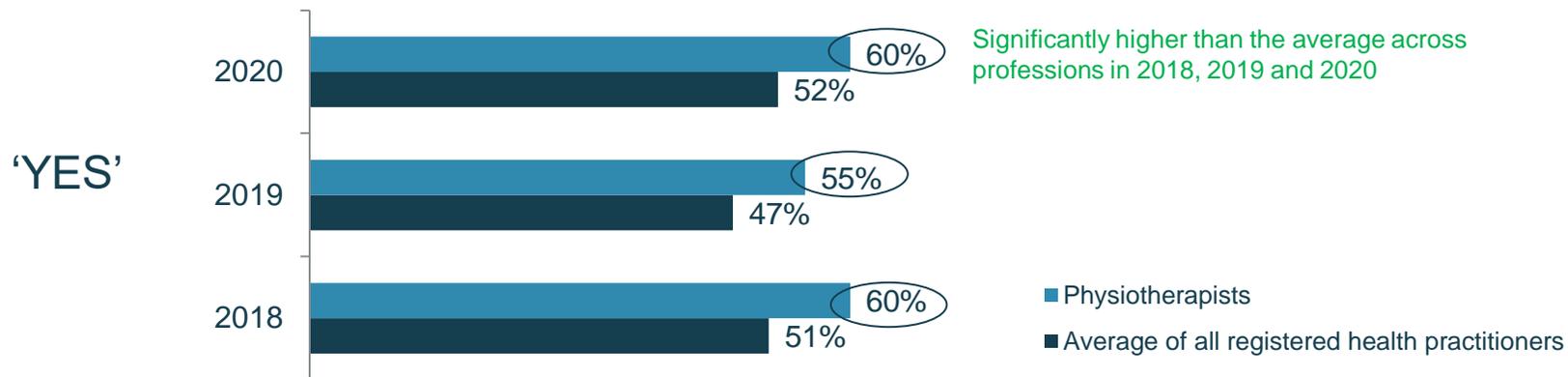
% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	2018 N=380	2019 N=288	2020 N=396
Rigid	13%	11%	11%
Trustworthy	14%	11%	11%
Accessible	17%	12%	10%
Responsive	9%	5%	9%
Shows leadership	8%	7%	8%
Controlling	9%	7%	8%
Poor communicators	9%	8%	8%
Transparent	9%	7%	7%
Intimidating	8%	7%	7%
Good communicators	9%	8%	7%

Green indicates a result significantly higher compared with the previous year.

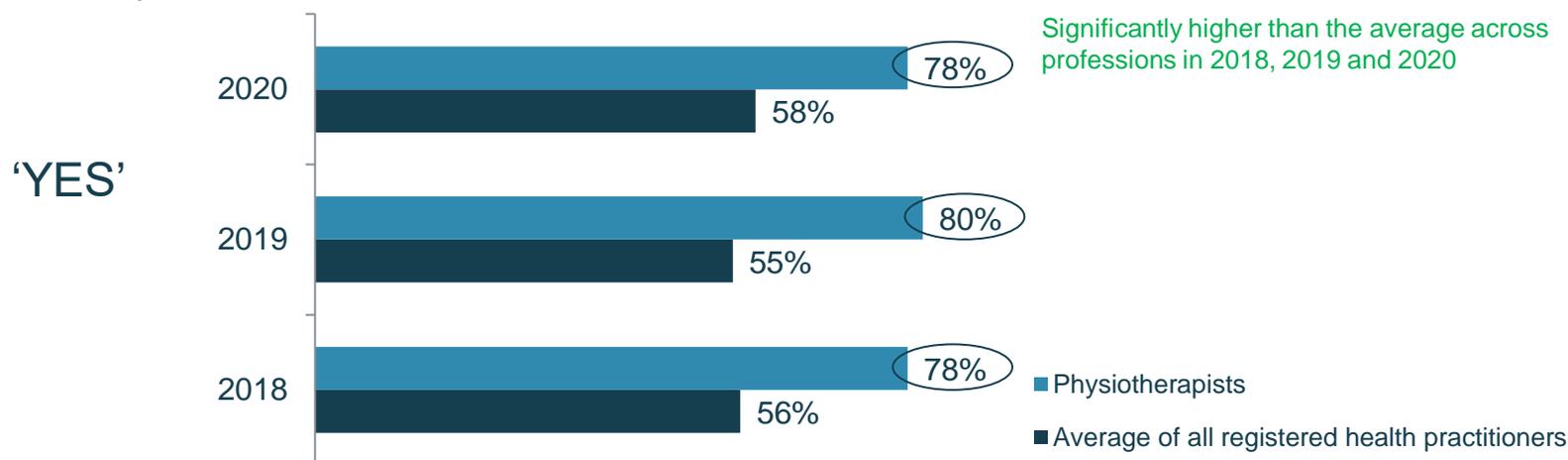
Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year.

Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among physiotherapists

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



Q. Do you trust Ahpra?



The indicators of trust and barriers to trust in Ahpra among physiotherapists

Indicators of trust: **78% trust Ahpra**

Because as our professional body, I assume they are competent and trustworthy although I have never had much direct contact with them or any issues to truly know.

I receive great information from them consistently and have had timely communication.

They are the regulating body. I have no reason not to trust them.

The registration process is easy and transparent with clear requirements for practitioners to make declarations that they are meeting required standards for ongoing practice through CPS, disclosure of criminal convictions etc.

I feel that Ahpra is a good thing for the safety of Australians when seeking health care. I don't know much about the inner workings of Ahpra but the concept is good.

They maintain a framework in which I am able to practice safely and have never given me reason not to trust them.

I think they are objective enough to deal with most circumstances with fairness to all people.

I believe they work within their guidelines and ensure that health care practitioners have the appropriate qualifications to practice in their area.

Barriers to trust: **7% DO NOT trust Ahpra**

Old fashioned and not with the times. Out of touch with the future and current standards and practices.

It seems to be an organisation that takes money for registration but doesn't do anything.

I was audited when I'd been on maternity leave and found the process to be unpleasant and felt the people, I dealt with to have an aggressive manner.

I believe they are largely under resourced and there is a lot going on that breaches the rules and regulations that goes unnoticed or unpunished because there just isn't enough manpower.

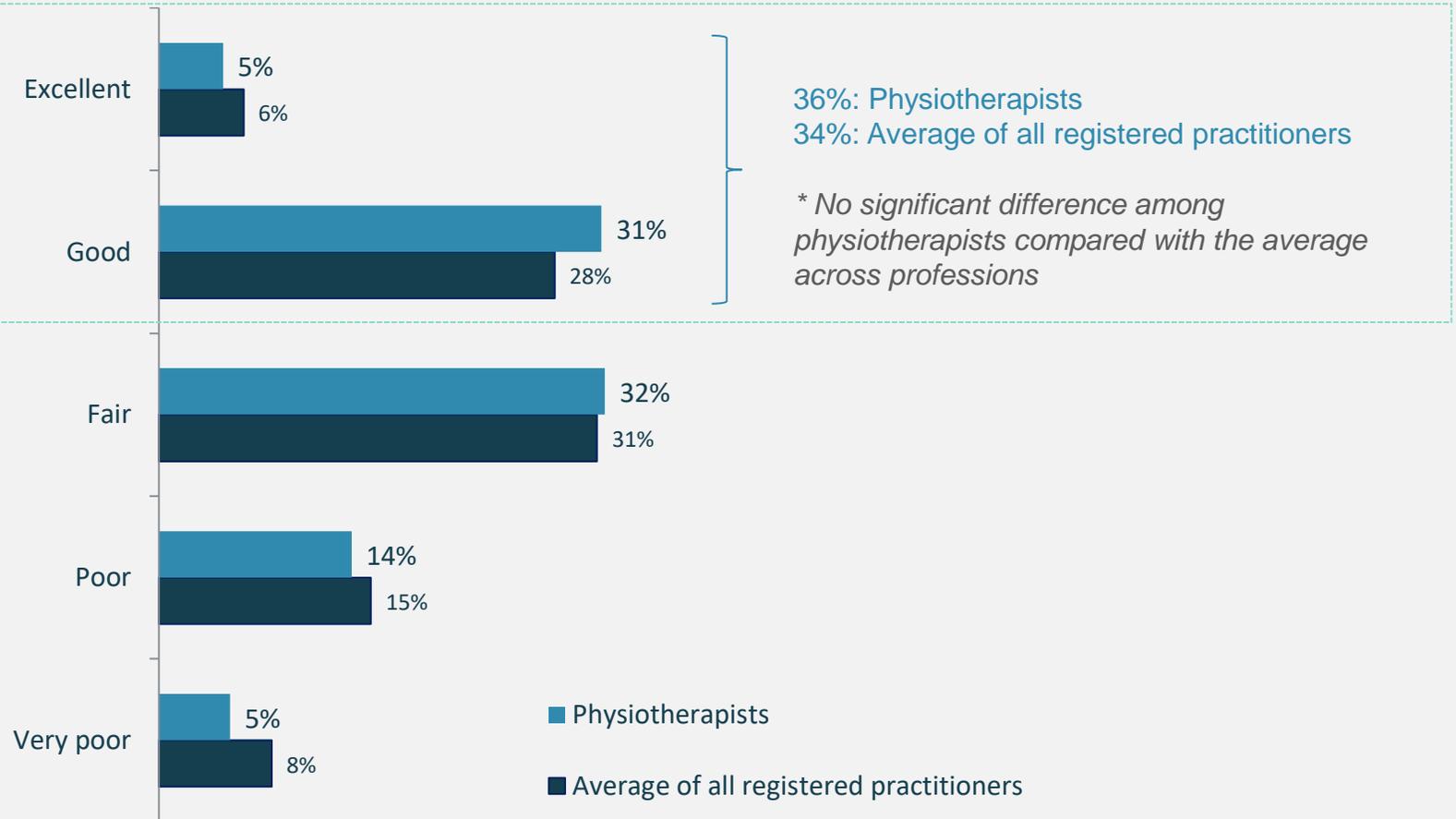
They don't really do anything and often defer disciplinary action toward the professional board the clinician is associated with and take no action themselves. Furthermore the cost discrepancy between professions for the same service is ridiculous.

It does nothing to protect the practitioner from malicious complaints and takes its mantra to protect the public at all costs to extremes.

Assessment of the level of support provided to practitioners from Ahpra and National Boards to maintain their professional practice

Q. How would you rate the level of support provided by National Boards and Ahpra for you to maintain or improve your professional practice?

Physiotherapists



Additional activities or support practitioners would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or the National Boards during the pandemic

Practitioners were asked what additional activities or support, if any, they would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or their National Board during the pandemic? Below is a sample of the open-ended responses provided.

(Full list of responses provided separately).

Look at the future of our professions and make changes now to future proof us. Student preparedness has been an issue for 20+ years and with the changing workforce its only going to get worse as students are graduated without appropriate skills or knowledge and it's left to the employers to fix them up.

I would like more effective advocacy from our professional organizations that make all our politicians/ bureaucrats held to account for their actions.

Appreciate that clinicians are overwhelmed with the clinical and non-clinical demands and while student placements are important, the strain was not adequately managed and has led to clinician burnout in our health service.

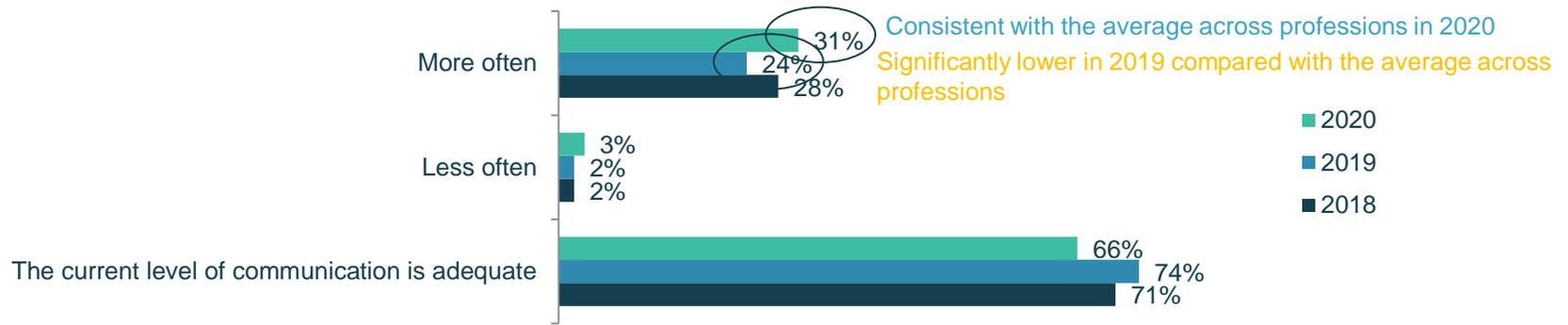
The exams are postponed by COVID-19 so we can't continue our way for general registration and Ahpra is not encouraging the board to do anything about this issue.

Clear fair work guidelines, providing a safe space to discuss workplace issues with the board.

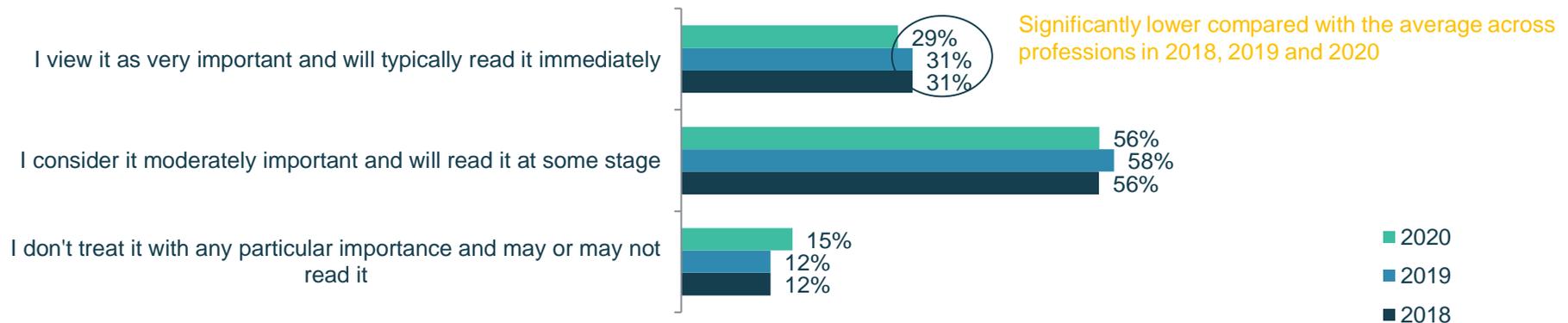
A stronger stance regarding the safety of practice for all Allied Health Services under Ahpra during COVID-19 and a clearer message to the public.

Response to communication by the Physiotherapy 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

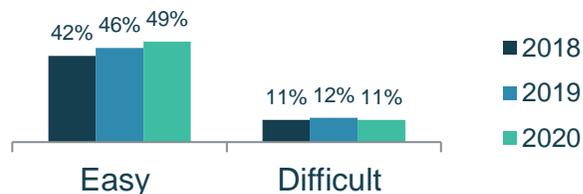
Use of the Physiotherapy Board of Australia website

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



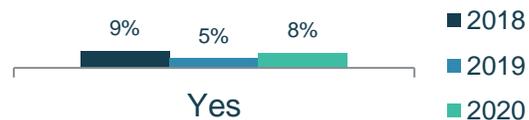
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this Board

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



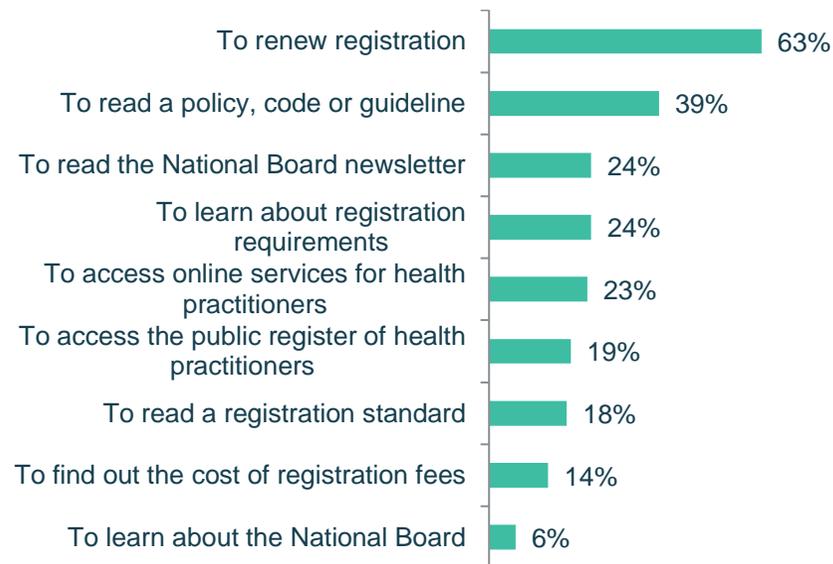
Base: Practitioners who have visited that Board's website

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

2020: Reasons for visiting the National Board website



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

- Details of the accreditation review.
- Legislation re aged care.
- Members and bio's of sub committees.
- Exact details about scope of practice.
- Easy to read and understand information around the code of conduct.

Contact details

Truly Deeply
18 Market St
South Melbourne
VIC 3205
(03) 9693 0000

For further information please contact:

Michael Hughes
Managing Partner
michael@trulydeeply.com.au

Jane Briggs
Research Director
jane@trulydeeply.com.au

Truly Deeply