

Professions Reference Group communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met by video conference on Wednesday 24 July 2024.

The CEO provided this update:

Implementing the Expert Advisory Group recommendations on practitioner distress (EAG)

Martin thanked the members and associations for the continued support on the on the work of the practitioner distress. Two short videos featuring senior medical practitioners talking about their experience of getting a notification were released on our social channels. The video featuring AMA president Dr Steve Robson and Medical Board Chair Dr Anne Tonkin has had tens of thousands of views on social media with a large amount of positive feedback. Ahpra are very keen to expand this work across other professions. Martin suggested if members had any individuals from their associations who would like to participate to please advise the secretariate or Susan Biggar who is leading the work of the practitioner distress project.

National Law amendments

On 1 July 2024, the final set of amendments to the National Law that were passed in the Queensland Parliament in 2022 came into effect across Australia. These changes include the new powers to issue Interim Prohibition Orders about unregistered persons or suspended practitioners who present a risk to public safety, and the changes to enable practitioners to lodge an alternative name on the public register and require practitioners to practise under one of the names listed on the public register. The next set of proposed amendments is reaching the final stages of drafting prior to submission to Health Ministers for approval. This includes the proposal to publish relevant regulator history for practitioners with previous findings of professional misconduct related to sexual misconduct, and the introduction of requirements for practitioners with cancelled registrations to seek a reinstatement order from a Tribunal prior to applying for registration with the National Board. Professions Reference Group

National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner

Ms Richelle McCausland has been reappointed as the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner for a second term of three years.

Dawson Review

Ahpra and National Boards continue to have active engagement with the Review of the Regulatory Complexity of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the Dawson Review). The Independent Reviewer, former NSW Health Care Complaints Commissioner Sue Dawson, had attended individual engagements with most of the National Boards and attended most of the Board meetings in June. During those meetings she outlined her approach to the review and the Terms of Reference. Those meetings presented a good opportunity for Boards to raise with her what they felt were the key issues the review should consider. The current phase of the review is preparation of a consultation paper including options for reform, and it is expected she will invite submissions in August. Ahpra and National Boards are working towards a joint submission to the review and exploring areas of both potential agreement and difference.

Regulatory Operations – verbal update

Registration

Data validation is being worked through currently for the Annual Report, there are no specifics for registration at this time, noting that there is a continued increase in registration applications when compared to the previous year across all professions. There is commonly a mid-year peak especially in internationally qualified practitioners particularly in medicine.

Notifications

Our data shows an increase of 15% in the number of notifications during the 2023/24 financial year was. Last year the Scheme recorded for the first time a decrease in received notifications. This year's increase has taken the year total to 11,200 and the highest number in the history of the Scheme. Completion timeframes are at 45% of notifications closed under three months, 80% closed in six months, compared to 59% last year. There has also been a reduced number of aged notifications.

Review into registration fees for practitioners on protected leave type

Members noted the work underway to review the fee setting policy for practitioners on protected leave arrangements. Members further noted that the potential model will be brought back to the PRG.

Publishing case studies that are representative of outcomes, instead of tribunal summaries, on our websites

Members noted the update on the proposal to replace tribunal summaries with deidentified case studies.

Transformation Program update

Ahpra are continuing to work towards a date of release for the Transformation Program to become operational with the expectation to have a system built and tested by the end of this calendar year. The PRG will be updated when there is a decision on the final date to turn the system.

Regulatory Intelligence

The Regulatory Response Unit has been established to look at individual practitioners' issues and connect it with the regulatory intelligence and policy responses. Specific issues include medicinal cannabis, weight loss medications and monitoring for vaping changes that are being addressed by governments and what further work may need to be undertaken by Ahpra. There has been work on the guidance to provide to practitioners with the use of AI in their practice, acknowledging that some member groups of the PRG have already published guidance in this area. We are looking at what may contribution Ahpra may provide in a short timeframe, acknowledging the existing obligations of practitioners under Codes of Conduct. Helen asked members if they have an interest in the user testing to advise us in the near future.

Next meeting:

Meeting #	Meeting dates	Location/type	Time – 1 hour
2024-09 PRG	Wednesday 11 September 2024	Virtual (Teams)	15:00 – 16:00 (AEST)