

Professions Reference Group communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met by Teams on Wednesday 11 September 2024.

In Martin's absence Chris Robertson provided the following update:

Martin Fletcher has resigned as Ahpra's CEO and will be stepping down in December 2024. Recruitment will be commencing next week for the successor of the role.

Fee policy review

Ahpra and National Boards are currently reviewing our fee setting policy for health practitioners on leave arrangements arising out of 'protected attributes' under discrimination legislation. These arrangements include parental leave as well as leave for people with a disability that may require substantial leave from practicing the profession. This follows concerns that have been raised that the current fee structure does not adequately account for registered health practitioners who take periods of parental leave from their practice of the profession.

Members noted that there will be a set of proposals sent to National Boards and a paper will come back to the PRG in November.

Current reviews

Scope of Practice review by Professor Mark Cormack

Professor Cormack met with National Board Chairs and Ahpra to discuss the final draft of his report and the proposed recommendations. Ahpra are supportive of the proposals in particular the areas of drugs and poisons and the funding reforms. Further feedback from Ahpra has been provided back to Professor Cormack. On his final draft of his report.

Dawson Review

Ahpra and National Boards continue to have active engagement with the review. Ms Dawson attended a meeting of National Board Chairs and Ahpra Board representatives on 11 July 2024.

Ms Dawson is working towards a public consultation paper and will be released shortly and a high-level summary with the areas to be considered. One issue will be the potential for how professions outside of the National Scheme could be recognised as self-regulated in an accredited register model being similar to the UK model or other types of mechanisms. This is included in both Professor Cormack's and Sue Dawson's Terms of Reference, and they are both working together to consider how their reviews can work together.

The review will be reported back to Health Ministers by the end of the calendar year with the implementation approach in April/May 2025.

Artificial Intelligence in healthcare

On 22 August 2024 Ahpra and National Boards published new guidance for health practitioners, 'Meeting your professional obligations when using AI in healthcare', along with a short news item. This guidance translates existing obligations in National Board Codes of Conduct (or equivalent) to explain how existing professional obligations apply when practitioners use AI.

National Prescribing Competencies Framework Rapid Review

Ahpra has been contracted by the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department) to review the Framework by June 2025 and host the Framework until December 2029.

The rapid review focuses on the following research questions: What new evidence is there for prescribing practice that can inform updates to the Framework and ensure that it remains fit for purpose and contemporary? What are the current and emerging trends in education and multi-profession practices?

The Reference Group supporting the review and the Scheduled Medicines Expert Committee (SMEC) have provided input into the review to assure identified themes are of relevance.

Family, domestic and sexual violence

On 16 August 2024, Health Ministers (meeting as the Health Ministers Meeting) met and considered the advice of National Boards and Ahpra (provided in June 2024 to Federal Health Minister, the Hon Mark Butler MP) on options to advance family, domestic and sexual violence training in the health care workforce. Ministers agreed with the actions proposed by National Boards and Ahpra for implementation. Ahpra will now draft an implementation plan for consideration by National Boards to progress this work.

Regulatory Operations – verbal update

Matthew Hardy provided the following update:

Registration

There are 920,000 currently registered health practitioners. There are very strong performance metrics this financial year with 99% of registration applications being completed and timeframes of completed registration applications being at two days.

There is currently a focus on the higher number of applicants coming through the trans-Tasman mutual recognition process. Some of the professions the rate of applications has been much higher than in the past and the National Boards are considering what this means for the workforce.

The NMBA renewal campaign has concluded with 95.7% of applicants renewing within the timeframe and it being consistent with last year percentage. There was a slight increase in the proportion of Nurse and Midwives renewing in the late period with thought that may be the cost of living.

The medical renewal is underway, and registration is due by 30 September 2024. The campaign is tracking well with 51% of all eligible medical practitioners renewing.

The campaign is set to commence in the next couple of weeks for new registrants entering the Scheme through the graduate process.

Members discussed the increase of the number of applicants coming through the Trans-Tasman process and if this has caused any issues in the workforce in New Zealand. Members noted that this question would be taken on notice for a response.

Notifications

There has been a strong decrease in the number of open notifications over the past 12 months with a 20% decrease in the notifications that are open more than 12 months. Managing timeframes of notifications are reducing. From December 2023 there has been a strong growth in the number of notifications received at 41% being higher than this time last year. A contributing factor to this growth being the work on better accessibility and information out to the public.

Changes to the National Restrictions Library with a rewrite of restrictions will be released on 16 September 2024 this will be make restrictions shorter, written in plain English and to provide better readability.

Transformation Program update

Matthew Hardy provided the following 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

Helen Townley provided the following update:

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 and National Boards as to how we can contribute to helping practitioners better understand their professional obligations.

Next meeting:

Meeting #	Meeting dates	Location/type	Time – 1 hour
2024-11 PRG	Wednesday 13 November 2024	Virtual (Teams)	15:00 – 16:00 (AEST)