

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 Psychology 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.

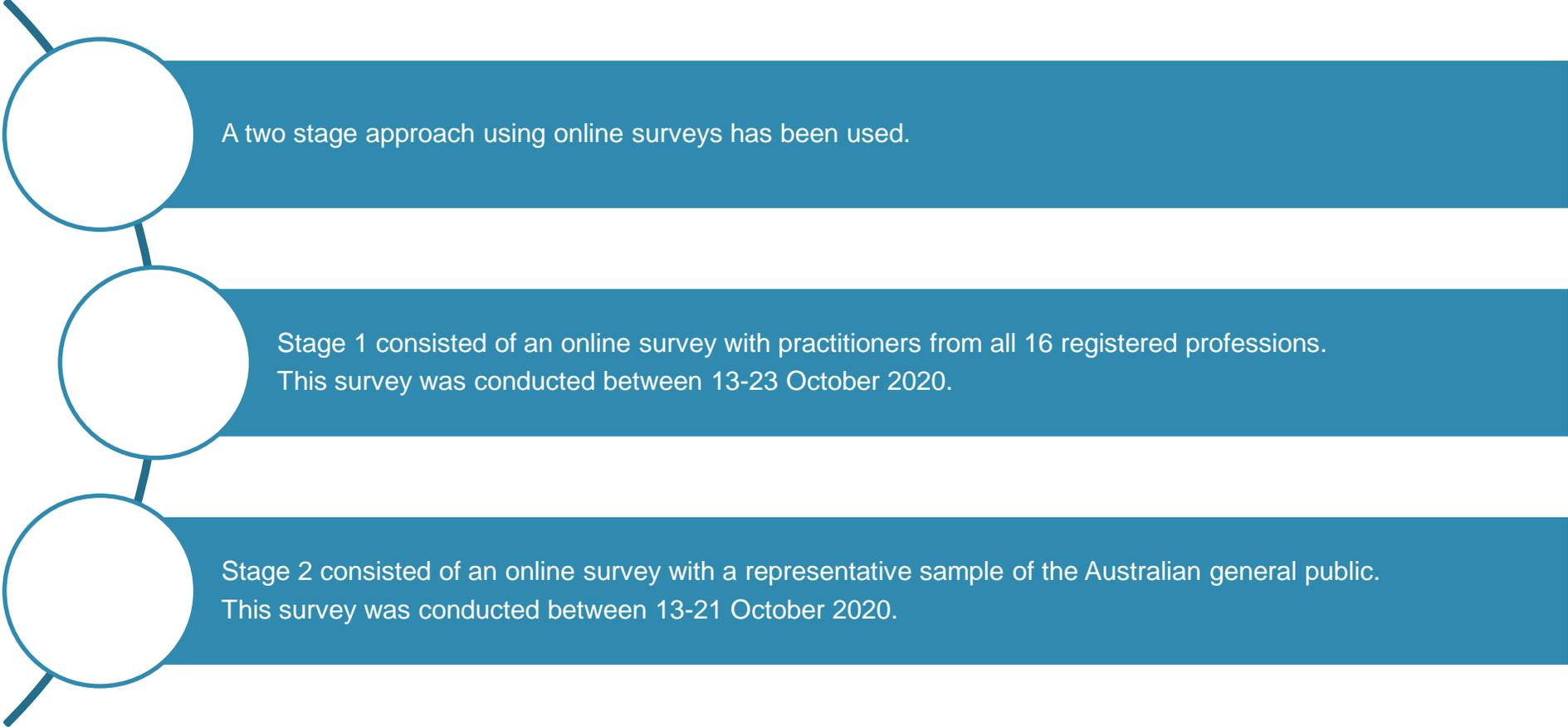
The benchmark 2018 study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically extended interviews (face-to-face and via the telephone), focus groups and online surveys.

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 **Psychology Board of Australia**.

An overview of the methodology



A two stage approach using online surveys has been used.

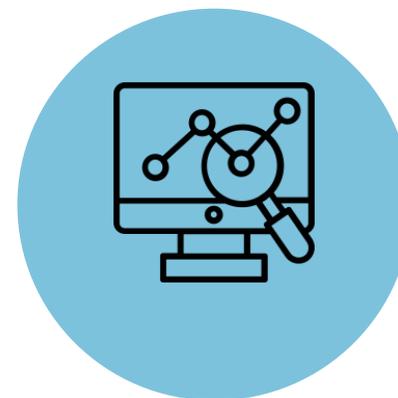
Stage 1 consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 16 registered professions. This survey was conducted between 13-23 October 2020.

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

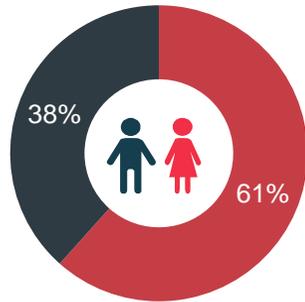
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community.
- The 2020 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 and 2019 questionnaires, with two additional questions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider. Quotas were placed 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%

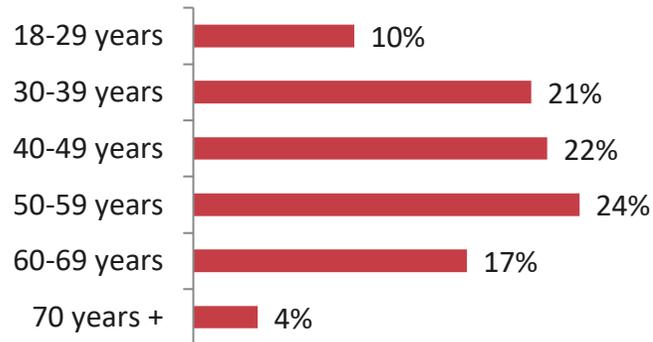


2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

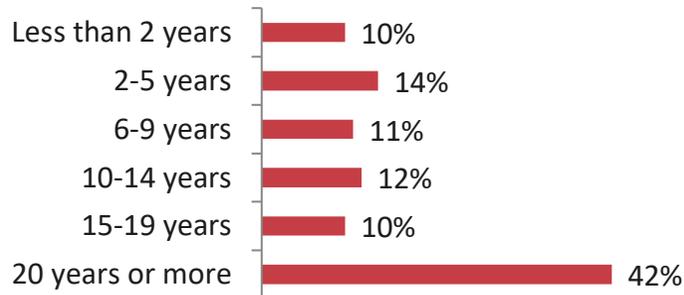
Gender



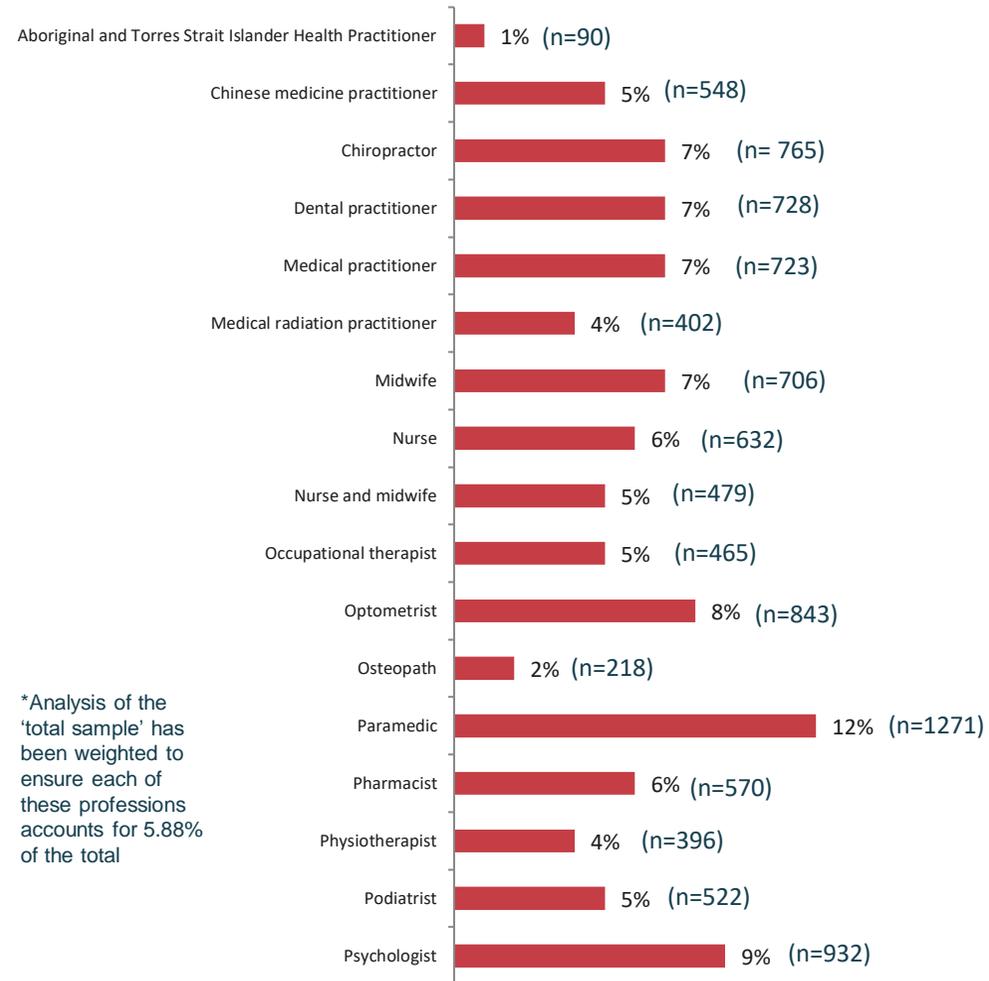
Age



Years in practice



Practitioner type*

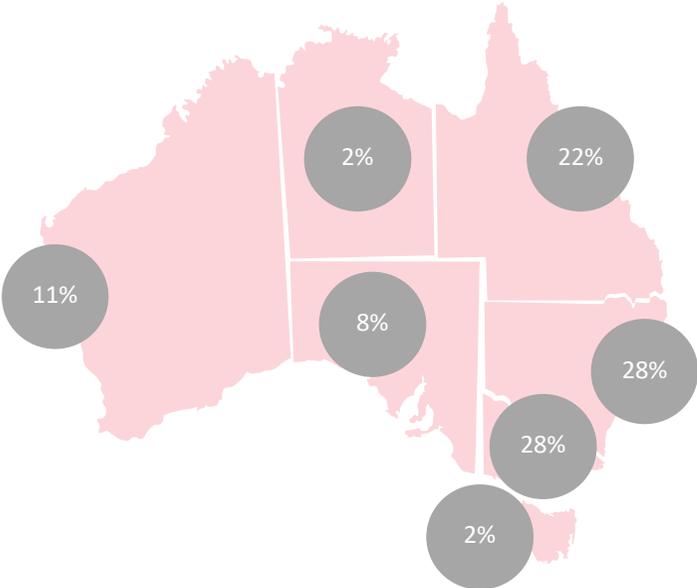


*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

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

Location

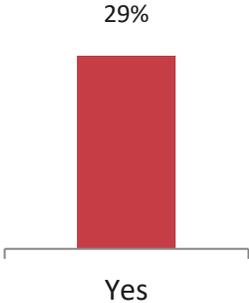


Metro: **63%**
Regional: **30%**
Rural: **7%**

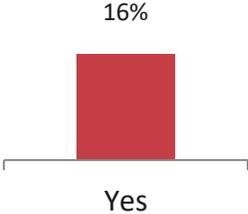
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



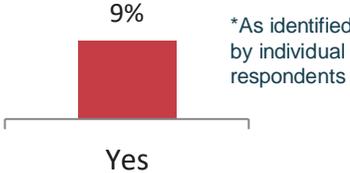
% who were born in a country other than Australia



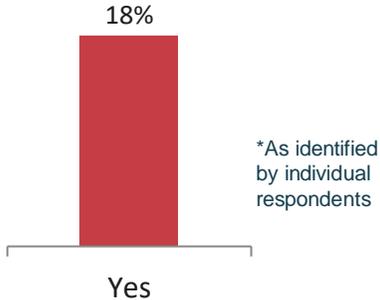
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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*

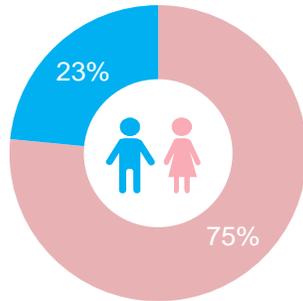


Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners

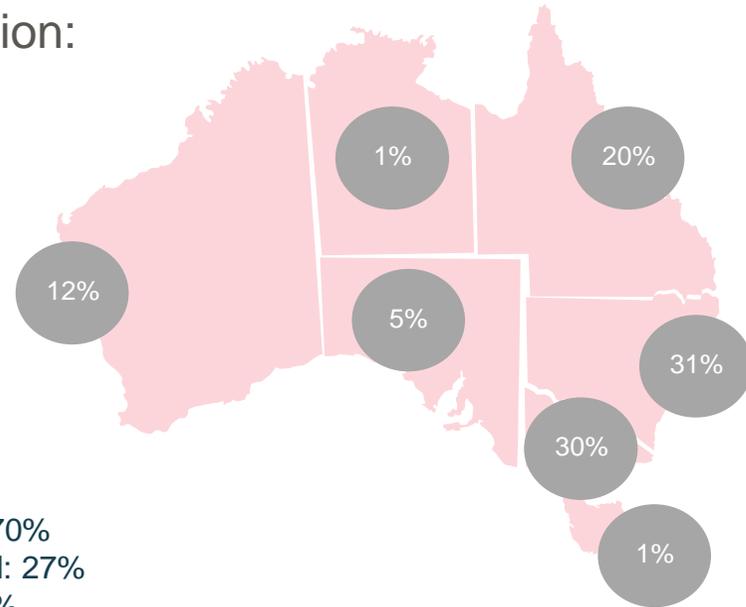
Specific insights into the responses from:
Psychologists

Sample of psychologists (n=932)

Gender:

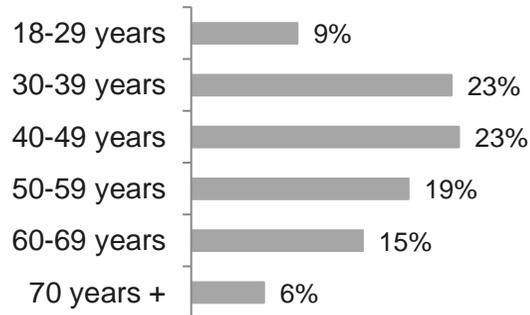


Location:

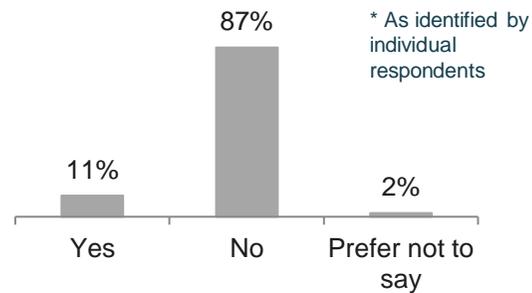


Metro: 70%
Regional: 27%
Rural: 4%

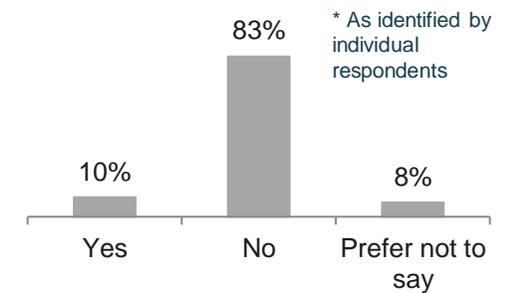
Age:



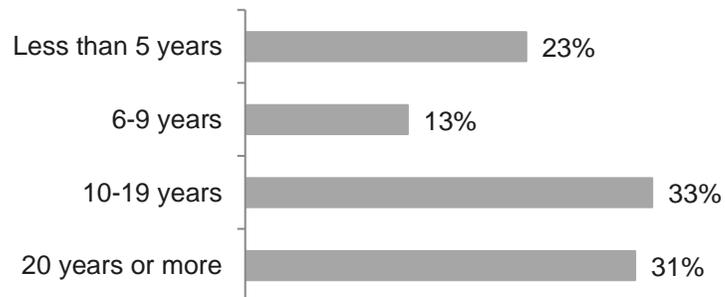
% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board*



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



Years in practice:



2020: Perceptions of the psychology 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=932)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	50%	(+5%)
Empathetic	46%	(+26%)
Compassionate	40%	(+17%)
Knowledgeable	30%	(-)
Caring	26%	(-2%)
Competent	24%	(+3%)
Trusted	22%	(-2%)
Responsible	21%	(+3%)
Committed	18%	(+1%)
Hard working	17%	(-12%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Respected	17%	(-3%)
Dedicated	16%	(-5%)
Reputable	14%	(+5%)
Open minded	12%	(+6%)
Community minded	9%	(-5%)
Approachable	9%	(-2%)
Nurturing	8%	(+3%)
Honest	6%	(-3%)
Passionate	6%	(-8%)
Independent	5%	(-3%)

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 psychology 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=715	2020 N=932
Professional	50%	50%
Empathetic	49%	46%
Compassionate	39%	40%
Knowledgeable	32%	30%
Caring	22%	26%
Competent	28%	24%
Trusted	19%	22%
Responsible	23%	21%
Committed	20%	18%
Hard working	17%	17%

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=715	2020 N=932
Respected	13%	17%
Dedicated	18%	16%
Reputable	13%	14%
Open-minded	14%	12%
Community minded	8%	9%
Approachable	9%	9%
Nurturing	10%	8%
Honest	7%	6%
Passionate	7%	6%
Independent	4%	5%

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 Psychology 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=932)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	44%	(+7%)
Bureaucratic	42%	(+16%)
Administrators	39%	(+7%)
Necessary	32%	(+1%)
Decision-makers	25%	(+2%)
For practitioners	23%	(-7%)
For the public	22%	(+1%)
Rigid	20%	(+11%)
Poor communicators	17%	(+8%)
Out of touch	17%	(+7%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Intimidating	16%	(+8%)
Controlling	13%	(+5%)
Aloof	12%	(+6%)
Competent	11%	(-4%)
Secretive	10%	(+4%)
Advocates	9%	(-8%)
Antiquated	8%	(+3%)
Fair	7%	(-3%)
Helpful	6%	(-5%)
Shows leadership	6%	(-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 the Psychology 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

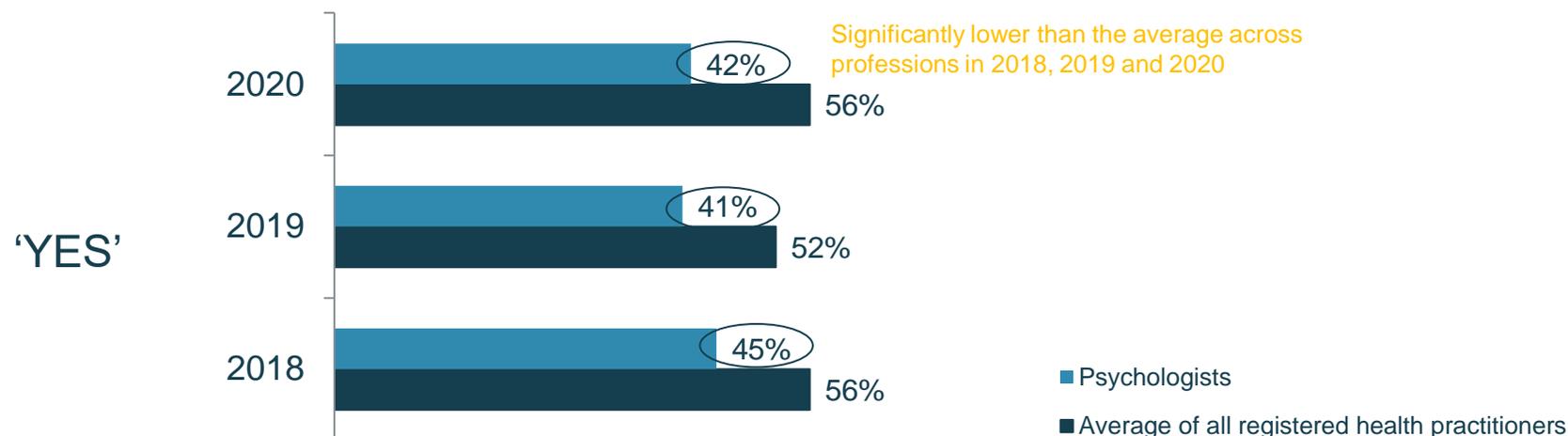
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=787	2019 N=715	2020 N=932	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=787	2019 N=715	2020 N=932
Regulators	43%	44%	44%	Intimidating	18%	14%	16%
Bureaucratic	42%	43%	42%	Controlling	18%	15%	13%
Administrators	36%	36%	39%	Aloof	14%	13%	12%
Necessary	36%	28%	32%	Competent	15%	9%	11%
Decision-makers	28%	24%	25%	Secretive	12%	10%	10%
For practitioners	28%	22%	23%	Advocates	11%	9%	9%
For the public	25%	22%	22%	Antiquated	9%	8%	8%
Rigid	23%	20%	20%	Fair	7%	6%	7%
Poor communicators	19%	23%	17%	Helpful	7%	4%	6%
Out of touch	20%	22%	17%	Shows leadership	9%	8%	6%

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

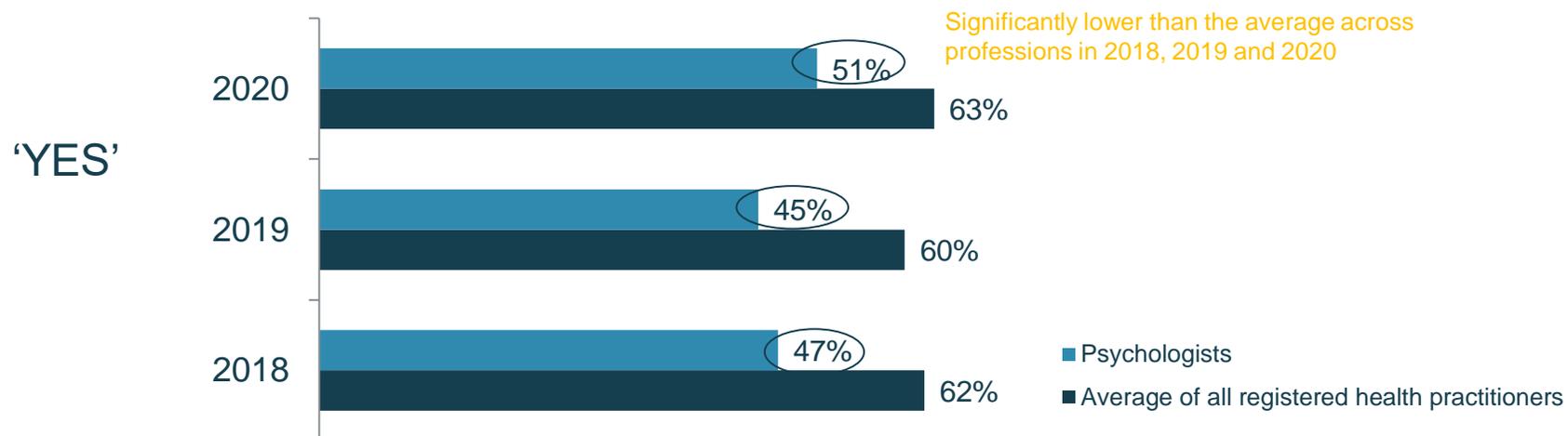
Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year.

Levels of confidence and trust in the Psychology 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?



The indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Psychology Board of Australia

Indicators of trust: 51% trust the Board

They have coped with conflict well. They advocate well and effectively on necessary topics such as COVID-19 and MH.

I feel they have the best interests of the profession at heart in terms of ensuring longevity and ethical practices of psychology.

I trust the Board to maintain professional standards, to regulate the profession and to support me in my work.

I think members of the board are trustworthy, but the board is out of touch in how long it takes to process members submission e.g. for registration and reviewing documents.

They ensure professional standards are kept, which gives practitioners a good reputation, and protects the public from poor quality/unprofessional service.

They haven't given me reasons not to and the effort going into communication and decision making is evident in the newsletters.

It is independent of government and made up of experienced psychologists.

I'd like to think our governing body has its members best interests' in mind.

My experience of the Board has been that it is firm but fair, and works to make practitioners safer, its not punitive but correcting, and so I think it has the right measure.

Full list of responses provided separately

Barriers to trust: 20% DO NOT trust the Board

I think they are more aligned with academics rather than practitioners.

Reputation for being inconsistent and poor at administration of registration.

Bureaucratic administration that does not generally give consideration for the professionals often at the mercy of manipulative and disturbed complainants.

Decisions around reducing the qualifications necessary for endorsement.

I've witnessed decisions being made without adequate and fair consultation that has negatively impacted on the profession. This is largely with regards to pathways to registration and endorsement.

I have not heard enough from the PBA that engenders trust.

I am hesitant to contact them as I am not sure who their clients is, is it me or the patient/client.

They investigate complaints that are clearly fake. They waste clinician's time. They are there to simply intimidate clinicians and act as barriers to good effective clinical practice.

There approach resembles the notions of absolute responsibility. More regulation than support.

2020: Perceptions of Ahpra among psychologists (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=932)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	63%	(+10%)
Bureaucratic	57%	(+21%)
Administrators	53%	(+8%)
Necessary	42%	(+6%)
For the public	35%	(+2%)
Rigid	28%	(+13%)
Decision-makers	27%	(+4%)
Poor communicators	25%	(+13%)
Intimidating	21%	(+6%)
For practitioners	20%	(-9%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Out of touch	17%	(+5%)
Controlling	16%	(+2%)
Aloof	12%	(+5%)
Competent	10%	(-3%)
Secretive	9%	(+2%)
Antiquated	8%	(+4%)
Accessible	6%	(-3%)
Trustworthy	6%	(-3%)
Fair	6%	(-3%)
Responsive	5%	(-3%)

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 psychologists

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=787	2019 N=715	2020 N=932
Regulators	59%	53%	63%
Bureaucratic	55%	60%	57%
Administrators	59%	49%	53%
Necessary	42%	36%	42%
For the public	37%	31%	35%
Rigid	28%	28%	28%
Decision-makers	28%	24%	27%
Poor communicators	26%	37%	25%
Intimidating	21%	21%	21%
For practitioners	21%	20%	20%

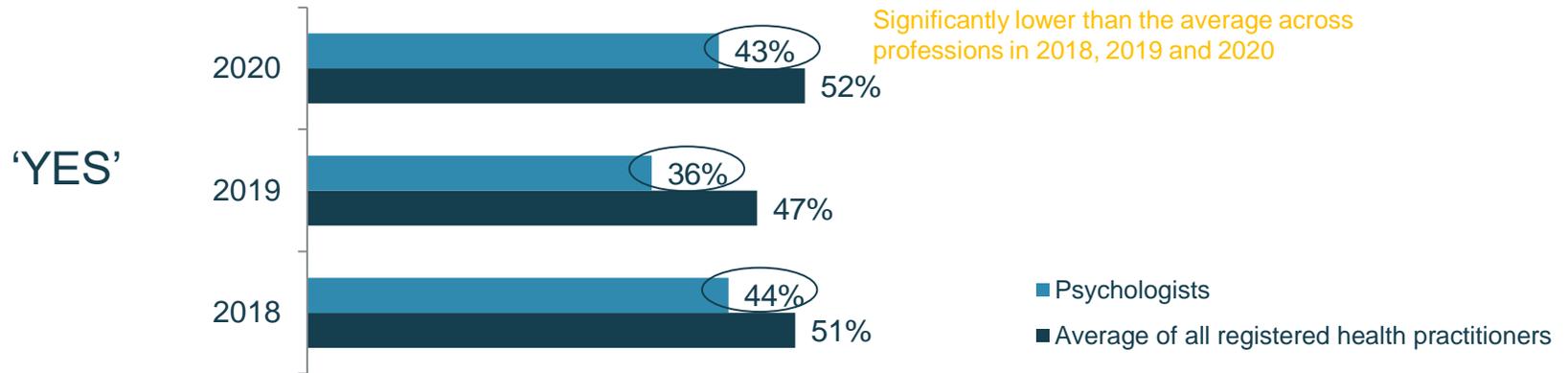
% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	2018 N=787	2019 N=715	2020 N=932
Out of touch	17%	26%	17%
Controlling	17%	17%	16%
Aloof	13%	16%	12%
Competent	13%	8%	10%
Secretive	10%	12%	9%
Antiquated	5%	8%	8%
Accessible	7%	4%	6%
Trustworthy	5%	5%	6%
Fair	7%	5%	6%
Responsive	4%	3%	5%

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

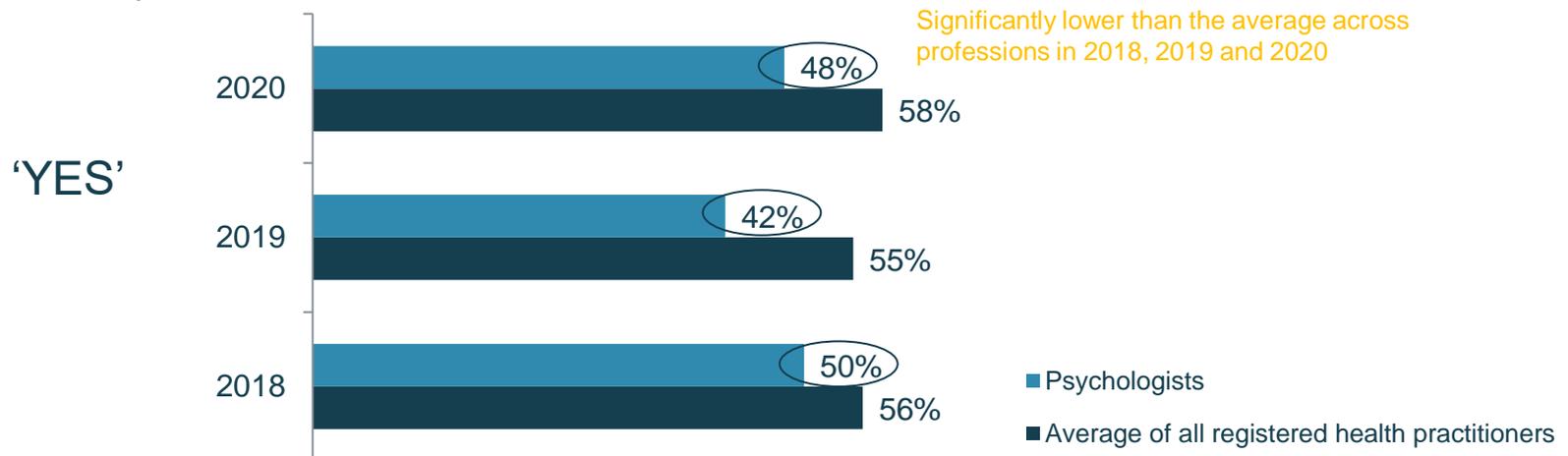
Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year.

Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among psychologists

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 psychologists

Indicators of trust: 48% trust Ahpra

I mostly think they are doing what they can to keep everyone honest and responsible.

I've not had reason or given witness to false or questionable conduct or outcome from Ahpra.

The content of their communications to me are professional, balanced and fair.

As they have been tasked with regulating the industry and I have to trust them, or I would have cognitive dissonance.

Set procedures, clear on how to make complaints, accessible website, reputation.

I trust Ahpra to uphold professional standards, to ensure that all practitioners are accredited, and to have a "big picture" of health professionals in Australia.

I believe they are doing the best they can to protect the public from poor service/malpractice, and to protect practitioners and their professional reputation. The rules for registration are strict but fair.

I would like to believe Ahpra does what is required to maintain an appropriate level of professionalism among health practitioners in Australia.

Although they can be slow, I believe they will ethically investigate concerns and deal with issues if they arise.

Barriers to trust: 22% DO NOT trust Ahpra

I do not believe they would be impartial.

Lack of competent employees. Communication takes months by which time issues are often resolved or too far gone to be addressed.

Until recently incredibly antiquated. Communication for registration issues is the longest I've had to wait for any company or organization ever. Fees are exorbitant for what effectively amounts to an online database with no customer service.

I've found it very difficult to get a straight answer or interpretation of very important matters regarding registration standards. I've had to seek my own independent advice on this just to understand it. I've also witnessed how Ahpra decisions have made things much more difficult for my profession, and consultation processes have not been fairly undertaken regarding some important changes. Some of these have seemed self-serving for those in high positions.

Registration processes are poorly managed. Complaints processes are slow and secretive.

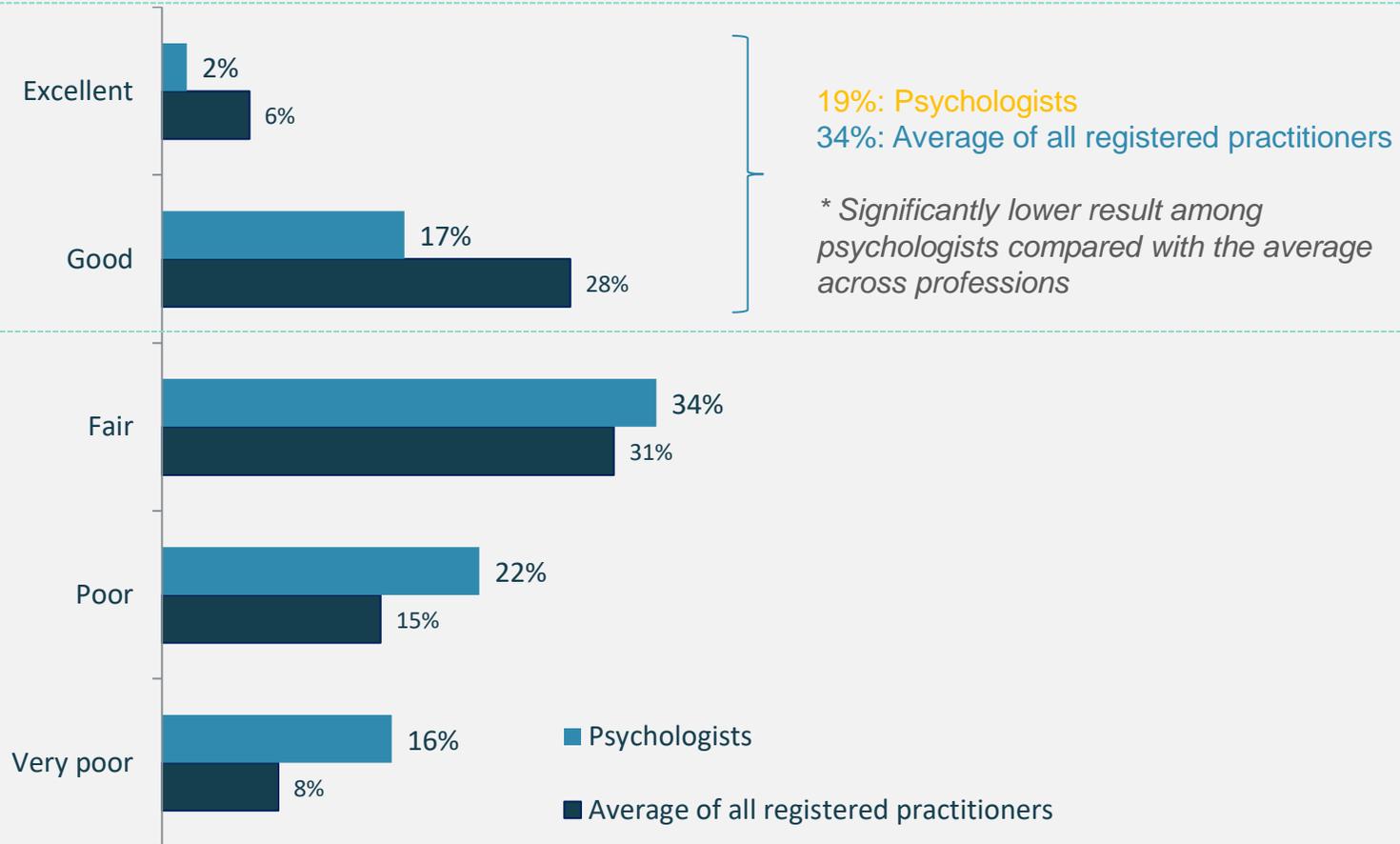
I don't feel they are there to support me as a practitioner.

Bad stories from other practitioners.

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?

Psychologists



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).

Better recognition of expertise from clinical practice not just academics.

Greater flexibility with supervision training requirements (especially masterclasses). Pathways to get provisional psychologists into work quickly in areas where there are shortages. Greater advocacy for psychologists in organizations under pressure (especially health and academic institutions). Better communication about flexible approaches listed above. Greater advocacy with government for flexibility.

Equal Medicare rebates for registered health care providers, fast-tracked registration for provisional health care providers, rebate incentives for provisionally registered health care providers.

Speak up about the inequity of a lower rebate for non-clinically endorsed psychologists, all of us do the clinical work.

Elimination of the distinct bias in favour of clinical psychologists.

Greater communication of our requirements for patient care, and staff safety, during the pandemic.

I thought their responses were generally excellent. It would have been helpful if Ahpra had employed additional staff to address the massive backlog in work/applications/reports. Our psychologists are often waiting months to receive confirmation of submitted applications, reports, etc. This is not acceptable.

Getting information out immediately by email to practitioners of all changes to Medicare provisions during the pandemic, and also actively campaigning e.g. continuing Medicare telehealth provisions for all psychologists.

A temporary reduced rate for registration.

Tighter practice and professional standards around telehealth.

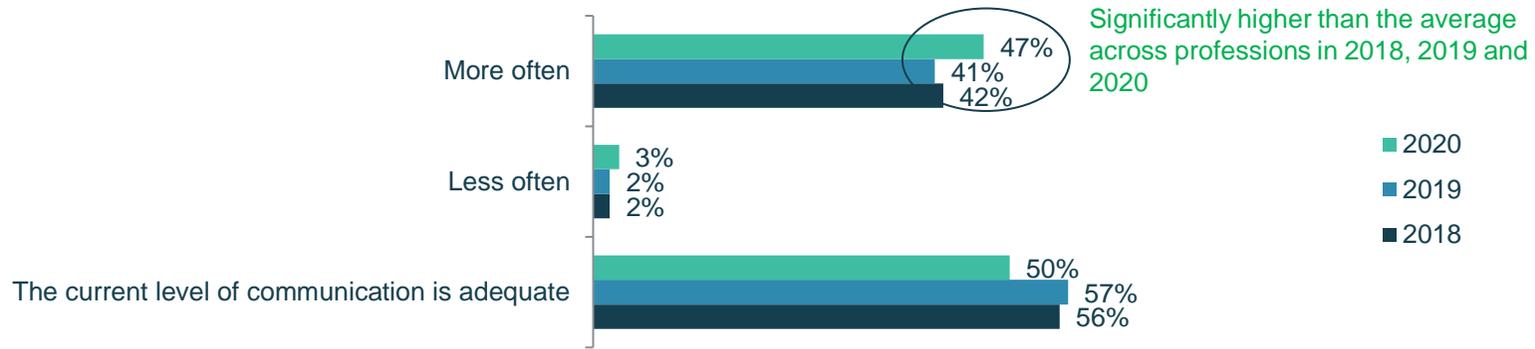
Some training and support around burnout in the profession and assistance working in a telehealth capacity.

Not just during, but beyond the pandemic, I would love a more human-face to Ahpra and the National Boards. This could be workshops on the reason and method of auditing, mandatory reporting requirements, and how to raise concerns. This could be individual phone calls where practitioners are invited to ask questions.

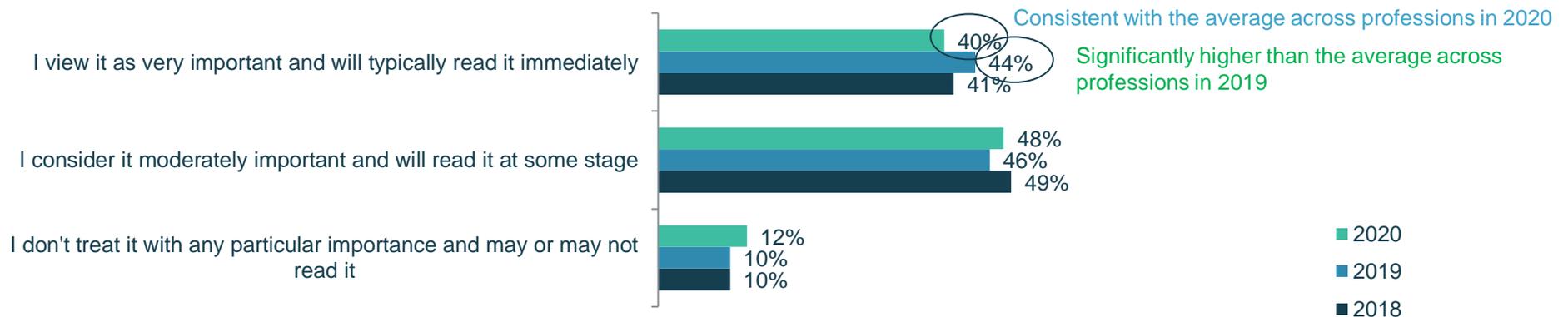
Let providers know there are many flexible options for fulfilling their CPD requirements.

Response to communication by the Psychology 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

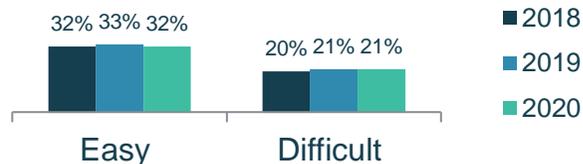
Use of the Psychology Board of Australia website

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



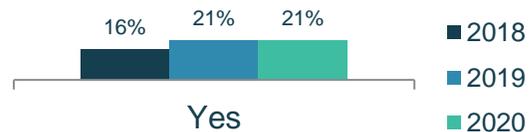
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this Board

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



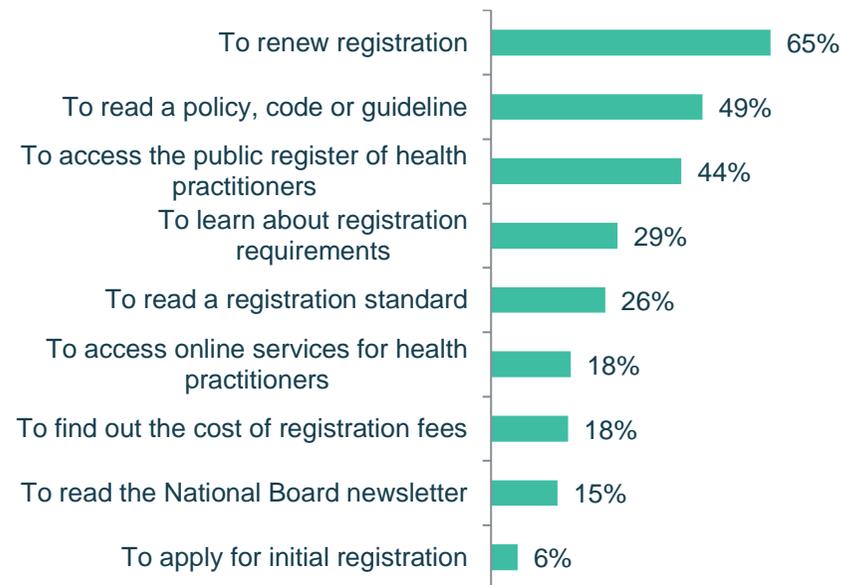
Base: Practitioners who have visited that Board's website

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)...

- Provisional psychologists' requirements.
- Information about registration standards and endorsements.
- Specific information about CPD.
- Clarification around registration requirements.
- Copy of the national law.
- Internship and supervision documents and guidelines.
- Access to the code of ethics.

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