

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met at the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) National office in Melbourne on Wednesday 28 February 2018.

New Chair

A new Chair was appointed, Ms Julie Reeves from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

AHPRA update

AHPRA CEO, Martin Fletcher, updated members on various matters, including the following.

- The Queensland Government has appointed Ms Rachel Hunter to the role of Health Ombudsman.
- AHPRA has been designated as a World Health Organisation (WHO) collaborating centre, a development which will formalise the agency's relations with the WHO. As a WHO collaborating centre, AHPRA will create a framework to help build capacity in Pacific and south-east Asian nations with respect to regulating health professionals.
- In November 2017, AHPRA and 13 National Boards published its [submission to the Independent Accreditation Systems Review](#). AHPRA's Agency Management Committee has decided to form an advisory committee on accreditation within its existing functions under the National Law. This group will strengthen corporate governance and oversight of the role of AHPRA in relation to current accreditation arrangements and AHPRA's Agency Management Committee functions.
- The [AHPRA Research Framework](#) has been published. The framework explains the way in which AHPRA may share data for research purposes, recognising the need to ensure strict privacy requirements are met, and how data requests can be made.
- AHPRA will soon be publishing research undertaken by the University of Melbourne [into vexatious complaints](#). The study found little published evidence that health practitioners formally complain about their professional colleagues in a vexatious manner. The study found that, on the best available data, no more than one per cent of notifications are considered vexatious.
- The ongoing work in response to the findings by Prof Ron Paterson in the [independent report on the use of chaperones](#). The Medical Board of Australia and AHPRA accepted all of the recommendations including recommended changes to the register. AHPRA plans to work with the MBA to progressively update the register of medical practitioners so that it displays a link to any decision made by a tribunal about a medical practitioner since 2010. AHPRA will also be proposing a similar approach to all National Boards.
- AHPRA has noted continued reliance on printed registration certificates by some employers despite certificates potentially being out of date (the online register is the best, most current source of registration information). AHPRA is working with National Boards to investigate the option of phasing out printed registration certificates while continuing to make registration certificates available online for practitioners to print as needed. More work will be needed to promote awareness of the online register, its advantages and how it is the best 'source of truth' on registration.

Regulatory operations update

AHPRA Executive Director Regulatory Operations, Kym Ayscough, updated members on a number of matters, including the following.

- There has been a significant increase in applications for registration from graduates. Compared with the numbers this time last year, there's been a 22% increase. This caused some initial delays, but performance has recovered and the median time to decide a complete application is down to 8 days. This is measured from when the application has been complete, including all necessary additional documentation. 95% of applications were lodged online.

- Nationally there is moderate growth in notifications being received, except in SA where the increase is 48%. Initiatives like triage and case conferencing are helping improve performance.
- AHPRA's quarterly performance reports continue to be [published on the website](#).
- AHPRA continues to work with Whitecoat and other similar third party organisations when it receives complaints they are in breach of the advertising requirements of the National Law. Consistent with its approach to registrants, the third party organisations is advised of the breach, given an opportunity to correct the matter before AHPRA audits the outcome. As with the majority of registrants who are in breach of the advertising requirements Whitecoat and the other third party organisations have responded positively in correcting breaches when they have been advised of the matter by AHPRA. When matters raised with AHPRA about Whitecoat are not a breach of the National Law, AHPRA has no standing to intervene in the matter.

Corporatisation of health care

- Discussion about role of health practitioner regulator (as opposed to corporate regulators) when there is broader issues at play, such as boards of directors directing the activities of health practitioners.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander health strategy group update

Anita Rivera, National Director Communications, provided an update to members.

- The scheme's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health strategy is progressing well. This work is being led by a decision-making group, the National Scheme Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Group. Members include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector leaders and organisations, and representatives from National Boards, AHPRA and the Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum. A statement of intent is being finalised and is expected to be endorsed by all Strategy Group members and entities in the National Scheme.
- The focus areas of the strategy are:
 - a culturally safe health workforce through nationally consistent standards, codes and guidelines across all professions within the National Scheme
 - increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the registered health PRG workforce, and
 - greater access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to culturally safe services of health professions regulated under the National Scheme.
- AHPRA is developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, incorporating the AHPRA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy, which is expected to be launched later in the year.
- Professions Reference Group members were very supportive of this work and interested in exploring future collaborations, such as a shared statement of intent.

Draft common protocol for informing notifiers about the reasons for National Board decisions

- As part of a targeted consultation with jurisdictions, community representatives, the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner and health complaint bodies in each state and territory, PRG considered a draft protocol for informing notifiers about the reasons for National Board decisions, which will support upcoming commencement of amendments to the National Law.

Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum presentation

Michael Shobbrook from the [Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum](#) addressed members.

- Forum is collegiate, sharing a sense of trust and working collaboratively across all accreditation authorities in the National Scheme.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the PRG will be on 31 May 2018.

Julie Reeves

Chair

Professions Reference Group