

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Thursday 23 April 2020.

The meeting was chaired by Nello Marino from the Australian Podiatry Association.

Overall update

Ahpra's Executive Director, Strategy and Policy Chris Robertson provided an update on the work of the National Scheme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that the current decline in the infection rate was encouraging and had meant that the requirement for a broad scale surge health workforce had not eventuated as yet in Australia. However, it is clear that the pandemic status in Australia could rapidly change and Ahpra was keen to keep playing an active role in preparing for situations where rapid response may be required.

Regulatory response to COVID-19: Regulatory policy and operations

Ahpra's Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough provided an update to members.

- The second phase of the pandemic response sub-register went live on Monday 20 April 2020. Approximately 5,000 practitioners were added in the professions of physiotherapy, psychology and diagnostic radiography. The Registration team is currently in the process of finalising the distribution of the sub-register to jurisdictions to assist in their workforce requirements. This work includes providing updates to the original data details to include the year of birth and area of speciality where relevant for medical practitioners.
- In Ahpra's registration function, there continues to be a focus on priority professions with a surprising increase in deferred graduates (primarily in the nursing profession) seeking registration – where these graduates had recently completed their education but did not apply during the graduate registration period. There has also been an increase in registration applications for those who have been off the register for more than three years. The pandemic response sub-register is for practitioners who have been off for three years or less. Ahpra is also working individually with practitioners added to the sub-register, who have previous open applications, to confirm their long-term intentions.
- Planning has started for the cessation of the sub-register when its role is no longer required. This includes working through what pathways and communications that may be required to assist in closure.
- The nursing and midwifery renewal process has commenced with no apparent change in the rate of renewal and statements of intention not to renew from previous years. The agreed approach on financial hardship was published on the Nursing and Midwifery Board website on 17 April 2020. It enables payment in two halves, first in May with the second half of the payment deferred to October this year.

Other business

There were no other items raised for discussion.

Next meeting

The next virtual meeting is scheduled for Thursday 14 May 2020.

Nello Marino

Chair
Professions Reference Group