

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Thursday 16 July 2020.

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

Ahpra update

Ahpra's CEO Martin Fletcher provided an update on the work of Ahpra to members.

- As of 1 July, there are over 35,000 practitioners on the [pandemic sub-register](#). We have implemented phase 3 to add Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners to the sub-register. For this phase we used a different approach with an opt in model. So far 22 practitioners have opted in out of approximately 180 eligible practitioners.
- Given the recent spike of COVID-19 cases in Victoria there has been a renewed interest in the sub-register. On 13 July an email was sent on behalf of DHHS to medical practitioners, nurses, midwives and physiotherapists on the sub-register with a principal place of practice in Victoria to provide more information on recruitment for a potential surge in workforce. We are currently working on an evaluation plan for the sub-register.
- With restrictions being lifted at a different pace in different parts of the country, the time frames for reopening Ahpra offices to staff are different for each state office. The Perth office reopened on 1 July, Adelaide office will reopen on 23 July, and Brisbane and Hobart are due to open on 29 July. The Canberra office opening has been delayed in line with local public health advice. At this stage, we do not have a date to open the Sydney or Melbourne offices. The Darwin office will open in September following an office refurbishment. Plans have been developed to meet physical distancing and COVID-19 safe requirements. The staff work pattern will be a 50/50 split between working in the office and at home.
- We have received Commonwealth funding to support our COVID-19 response. This funding will support the additional resources we needed to continue to function during the pandemic including establishment of the sub-register.
- We have released the independent review by the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner (NHPOPC) of the confidentiality safeguards in place for individuals making notifications about registered health practitioners. [The Review of confidentiality safeguards for people making notifications about health practitioners](#) and our responses to the recommendations are now available on the website.
- There are now two more releases available in Ahpra's [Taking care podcasts](#). One is an interview with Professor Keiran Walshe who discusses the purpose of regulating health professionals. The other is an interview with three practitioners who share the benefits and challenges faced by patients and practitioners in rural and remote areas particularly on the issues around health, safety and health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Regulatory operations update

Ahpra's Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough updated members.

- We now have agreement from all Boards to cease issuing hard copy certificates at renewal, starting with the medical practitioner renewal in September. Practitioners will be able to access and print an online version of their certificate.
- We are well placed for the next phases of registration. While borders are currently closed, we continue to receive applications from internationally qualified practitioners. We are progressing those applications as far as we can, but for now there are a number of applications that have progressed to the point where registration cannot be granted until they can come into the country and complete their proof of identity requirements.

- Planning is well underway for the end-of-year graduate registration and we are aware that some clinical placements may have been affected by COVID-19. There was concern among members particularly about the quality and availability of clinical placements and how this affects students in fulfilling their requirements for graduation. Ahpra will continue to work with key stakeholders to understand the impacts and consider different scenarios.
- Ahpra is currently looking at ideas to better manage the peak in graduate applications to complete more applications earlier. The proposal is to identify priority lodgement periods by profession and target communications to one or two professions in blocks for priority lodgement. The intention is to manage the lodgement pattern to the extent possible so that staff resourcing is matched directly with the lodgement pattern. Historical patterns and feedback received were reviewed as part of identifying this approach. COVID-19 implications have also been considered, including that some professions will potentially encounter delays in confirming qualification because of access to clinical placements and that there may be a compression between graduation date or qualification date and employment start date. Other professions will not be prohibited from lodging applications during those priority periods.
- The recent graduate period campaign review has provided more clarity on what issues were common across uncompleted applications. The communication messages for the next round will highlight what is required to complete applications and how to support applicants to ensure that their application is complete upon lodgement.
- The [Regulatory guide](#) about how the Boards and Ahpra manage matters particularly part 8 has been published. It comes in a full detailed version and a short form document which is a very helpful reference on how this part 8 of the National Law is administered.

National Scheme Strategy 2020-25

Ahpra's National Director, Strategy Paul Shinkfield updated members.

- Ahpra and the National Boards have published the [National Registration and Accreditation Scheme Strategy 2020-25](#) and Mr Shinkfield briefed the members on the brand new vision, mission for the National Scheme and set of values. The strategy describes the four strategic themes guiding our work as we focus on building communities' trust and confidence in the practitioners that we regulate. There is a strong need to engage with key stakeholders in achieving this vision by 2025.

Update on the implementation of the policy directions issued by the Health Council

Ahpra's National Director, Engagement and Government Relations Nick Lord updated members on the implementation of PD 2019-1 and thanked members for feedback received on the implementation of the policy direction.

Next meeting

The members agreed to proceed with the next virtual meeting on Thursday 20 August 2020 at 3 – 4pm.

Nello Marino

Chair
Professions Reference Group