

Community Reference Group Communique

Q2 / 2020 meeting

The Community Reference Group (CRG) met via Zoom on Wednesday 16 June 2020.

Revised National Scheme Research Framework and priorities

Dr Eva Saar, Manager Research and Evaluation, Research Unit sought the groups feedback on the draft Revised National Scheme Research Framework and revised research priorities.

Members provided feedback on specific issues and suggestions on ways to present results that aid communication. Members also highlighted the benefit of the research journey being a partnership or a cooperative undertaking, especially with stakeholders who may not value research as much, showing early results and asking for guidance on interpretation and the importance of communicating what the results mean in practical terms for the community (beyond all the technicalities of the research).

Members queried whether the research priorities align with policy directions within the National Scheme, if decisions are being made within community expectations, and if there is an opportunity for community-generated research and/or consumer participation. Dr Saar commented that the Framework is Scheme wide and confirmed there is scope for community perspective and partnerships.

Consultation process review

Ms Helen Townley, National Director, Policy and Accreditation attended the meeting to seek further feedback and input from the group on the updated externally-facing draft Consultation process for National Boards and on related issues.

Members indicated their support for the draft Consultation process for National Boards including for the draft Patient health and safety impact statement (statement) and draft Patient health and safety impact assessment (assessment). Members noted National Boards are keen to proceed with consultations and were supportive of the pilot approach proposed.

Members questioned whether there is duplication in the Consultation process for National Boards and the National Scheme Engagement Strategy and whether Ahpra should look to combine them, or else ensure that they are used in concert.

Members provided feedback and highlighted issues for consideration such as paying consumer representatives, which is common practice amongst consumer groups.

CEO update

Mr Fletcher noted that the group last met immediately prior to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted work undertaken since that time as part of Ahpra's response to the pandemic. This included development of the pandemic sub-register, National Boards agreeing to flexible application of registration requirements, such as continuing professional development, and focusing on Ahpra's workforce as it moved quickly to working from home arrangements.

With many states and territories easing restrictions, Ahpra is now planning the return of staff to office-based work. Planning has included surveying staff to obtain their thoughts on working arrangements.

Forum of NRAS Chairs meeting report

Ms Hall shared with the group that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Forum met weekly from mid-March till May and at the latest meeting agreed to move to fortnightly meetings. Topics of discussion included the surge workforce, the impact of COVID-19 on accreditation processes and students' clinical practice, the work of the Business Continuity Planning Working Group including

acknowledging the pivot that Ahpra staff had made to move very quickly to working from home arrangements with minimal disruption to business as usual work. Forum members also discussed that some notifications have arisen that relate to COVID-19, and that concerns have been raised about false advertising and public health messaging.

Update on Policy Direction One

Mr Nick Lord, National Director, Engagement and Government Relations updated the group on actions that Ahpra and National Boards have taken to support the full implementation of Ministerial Policy Direction 2019-01 and sought feedback on how Ahpra and National Boards intend to apply the provisions of PD 2019-01 in their regulatory work.

The group considered key issues including what matters PD2019-01 applies to, whether a broad definition of conduct will be used, the understanding of and weight to be given to public expectations in conduct matters, and the basis for disclosure being nature and magnitude of risks to the public, and the purpose which the entity disclosed to will use the information.

Mr Lord highlighted that policy direction 2019-01 affirms that Ahpra and National Boards must act in the interests of public protection, requires Ahpra and National Boards to consider the impact of a practitioner's conduct on the public when deciding whether to take regulatory action, and sets out some requirements for decision making on serious conduct matters.

Mr Lord identified that while much of the process used by Ahpra and National Boards to assess notifications regarding health practitioners will not change as a result of PD 2019-1, it does mean that Ahpra and National Boards will carefully consider public safety and public expectations in decision making regarding practitioner conduct. Consideration is given to the potential impacts of the conduct upon vulnerable groups within the community.

Members queried who the decision makers are in these matters, and whether or not the community member from a National Board will be on these panels making decision about behaviour. Members commented on the ongoing confusion they have been alerted to among Boards about the role of the community member and noted the importance of ensuring that a community member can represent the reality of life for the general public. Members noted that the importance of community members having good connections with their own community.

Update on NRAS Engagement strategy

Anita Rivera, National Director, Communications and Susan Biggar, National Engagement Advisor advised the group that since the last meeting the National Scheme Engagement Strategy has been finalised and a draft presented to the Agency Management Committee for endorsement. Ms Rivera identified that the Engagement Strategy links to the National Scheme Strategy and that at its core binds our effectiveness as a regulator with our ability to develop trust and confidence.

Ms Rivera thanked the CRG for the many hours of considered feedback and input that members have contributed to the development of the Engagement Strategy and advised the group that the next steps include obtaining IAP2 endorsement, finalising the customer service charter and embedding a customer-centric approach in staff position descriptions and performance processes.

CRG workplan 2020-21

The group considered their draft workplan for 2020-21 and suggested that it focus on setting their agenda; the strategic role of the CRG in relation to the Ahpra and National Boards consultation processes and the National Scheme engagement framework; and their role in local community engagement and how it aligns with State and Territory Managers' local engagement.

Mark Bodycoat

Chair

Community Reference Group