
Ahpra

Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2019

A Social Research Project

November 2019

Supplementary report prepared for:
The Dental Board of Australia

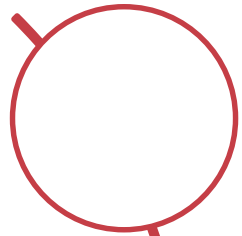
Truly[®]
Deeply



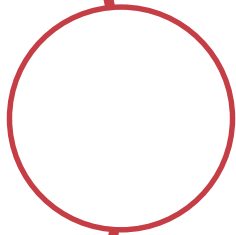
Introduction

- 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 the organisation 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.
- 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 Dental Board of Australia.**

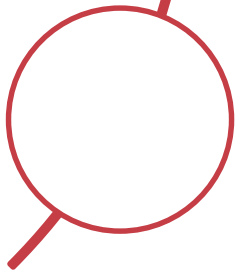
An overview of the methodology



A **two stage** approach using online surveys has been used.



Stage 1 consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 15 registered professions. This survey was conducted between October 30-November 8, 2019.



Stage 2 consisted of an online survey with a representative sample of the Australian general public. This survey was conducted between November 1– 6, 2019.

Quantitative approach

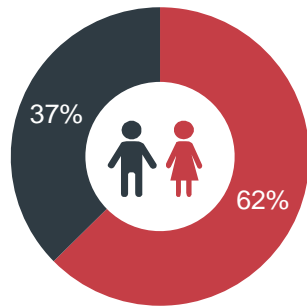
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community following the qualitative investigation.
- The 2019 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 questionnaires, with only a small number of additions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external 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	Nov 1-6	Oct 30 to Nov 8
Responses	2,048	5,944
Email invitations sent	na	109,625
Response rate	na	5.4%

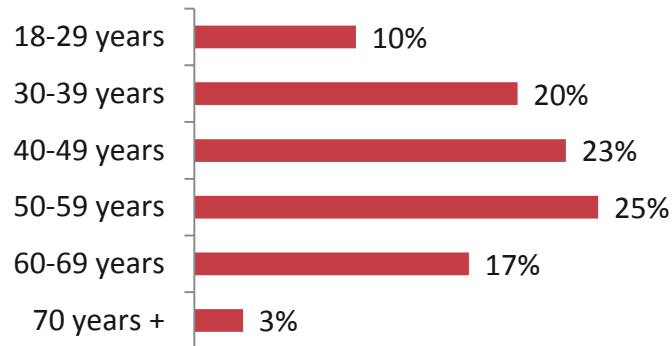


2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

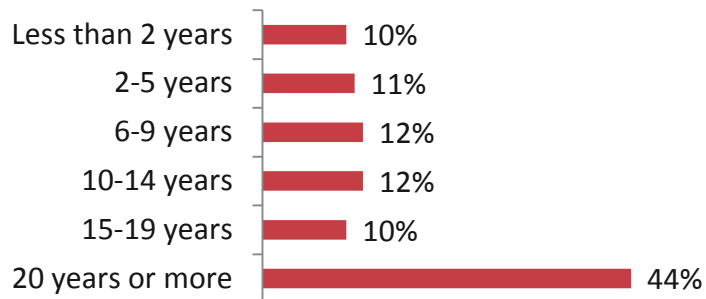
Gender



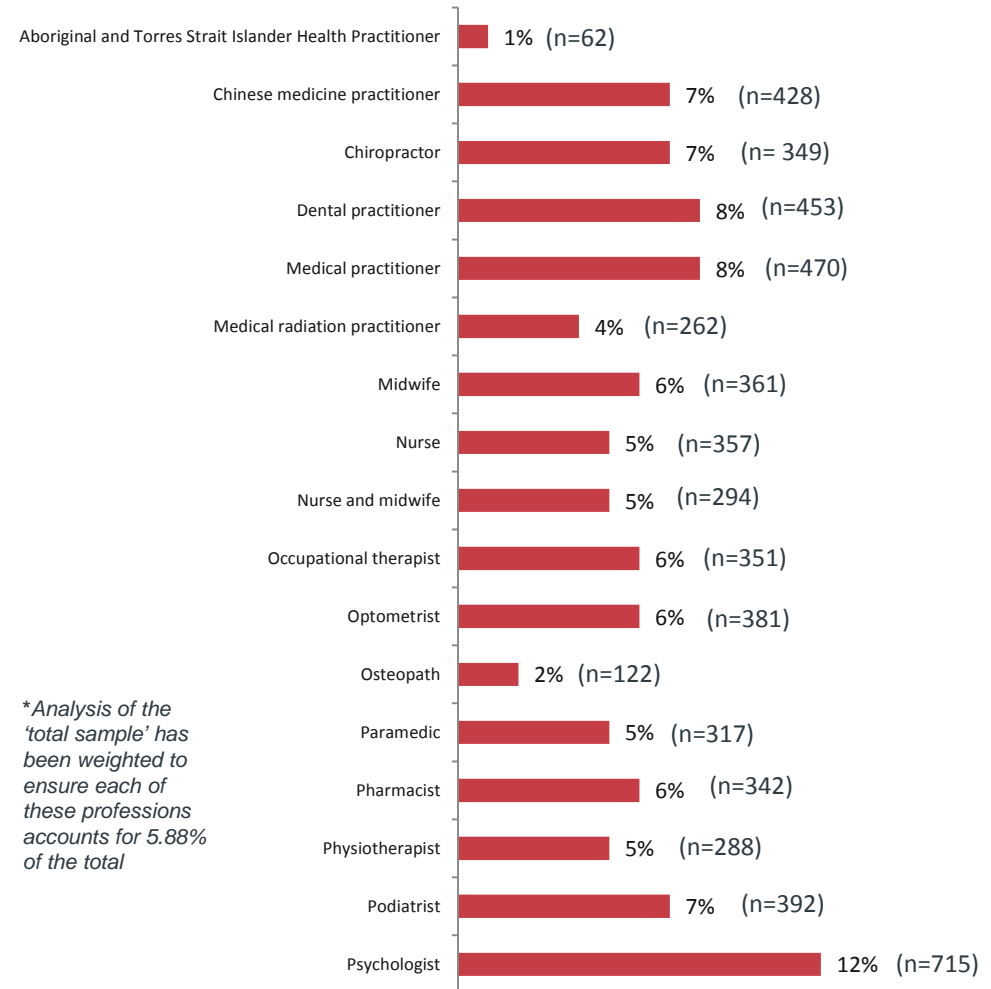
Age



Years in practice



Practitioner type*

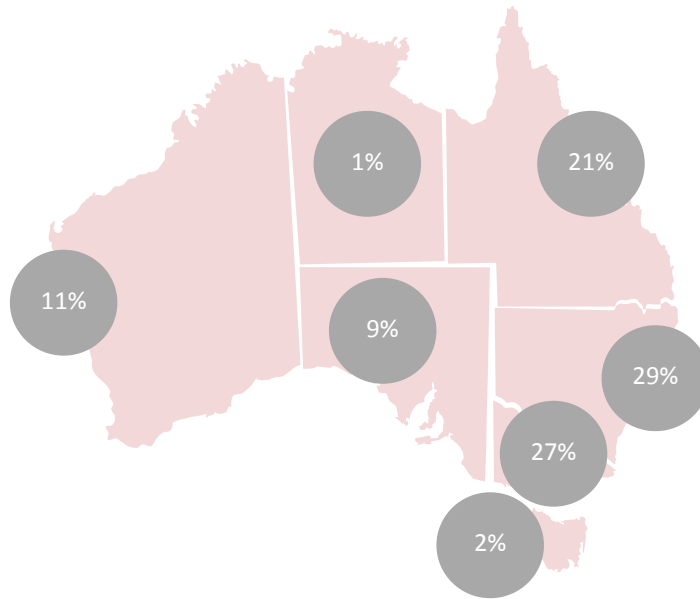


*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

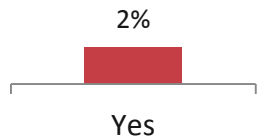
2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

Location

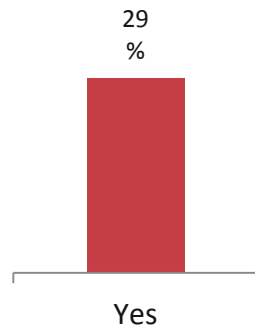


Metro: **64%**
Regional: **36%**

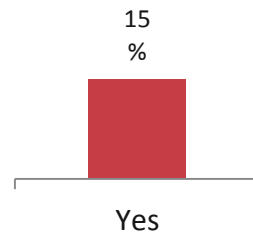
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



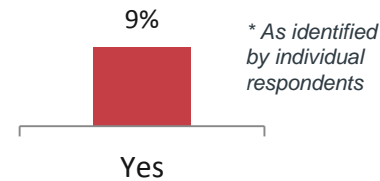
% who were born a country other than Australia



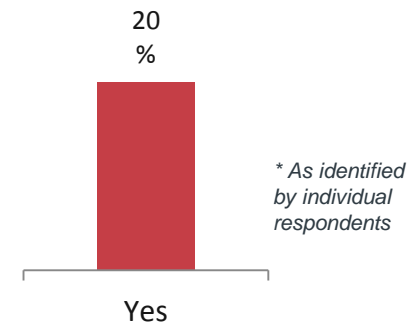
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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*

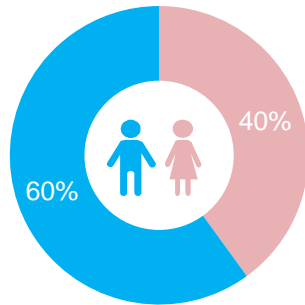


Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners.

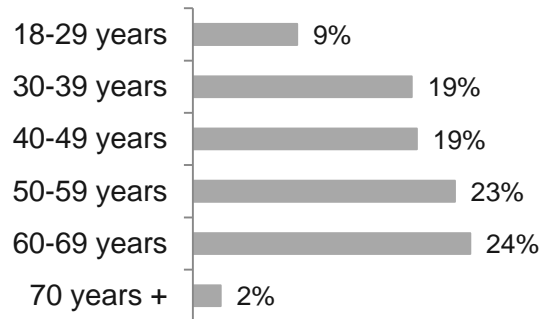
Specific insights into the responses from:
Dental practitioners

Sample of dental practitioners (n=453)

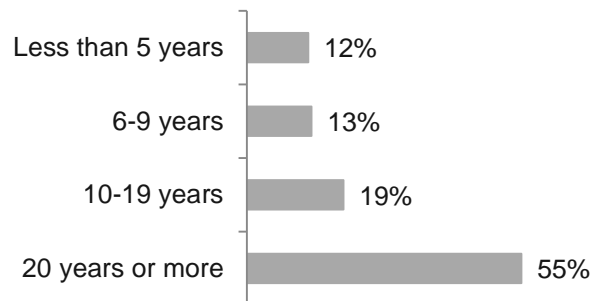
Gender:



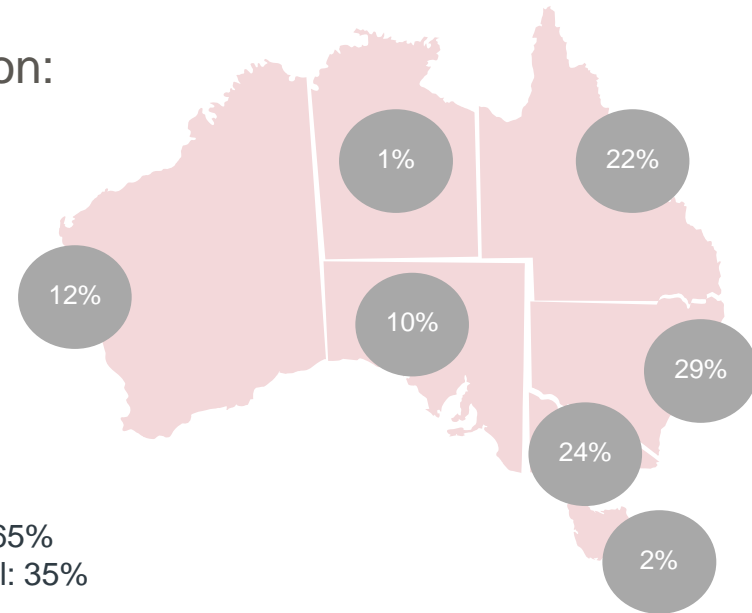
Age:



Years in practice:

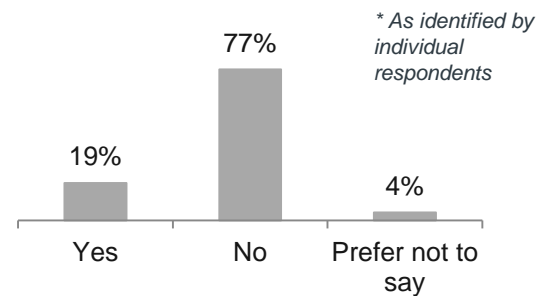


Location:

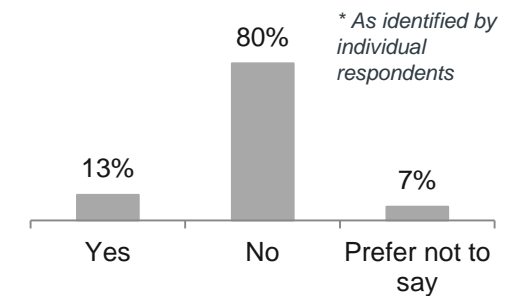


Metro: 65%
Regional: 35%

% 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*



2019: Perceptions of the dental 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=453)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	58%	(+11%)
Hard working	35%	(+5%)
Knowledgeable	31%	(+1%)
Responsible	26%	(+7%)
Caring	24%	(-3%)
Competent	22%	(-)
Respected	21%	(+2%)
Trusted	19%	(-3%)
Dedicated	18%	(-3%)
Reputable	16%	(+5%)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Compassionate	15%	(-9%)
Committed	15%	(-1%)
Empathetic	14%	(-7%)
Honest	13%	(+4%)
Team oriented	12%	(+4%)
Community minded	10%	(-2%)
Independent	10%	(+3%)
Passionate	9%	(-4%)
Intimidating	7%	(+5%)
Out of touch	6%	(+2%)

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019* than the average across all professions.

* *New question for 2019*

2019: Perceptions of the Dental 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=453)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Bureaucratic	43%	(+16%)
Regulators	40%	(-)
Necessary	34%	(+2%)
Administrators	30%	(-4%)
Out of touch	29%	(+17%)
For the public	25%	(+2%)
Decision makers	22%	(-2%)
Rigid	20%	(+11%)
Intimidating	19%	(+11%)
Poor communicators	18%	(+7%)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Controlling	17%	(+8%)
For practitioners	17%	(-15%)
Secretive	14%	(+7%)
Aloof	13%	(+6%)
Competent	12%	(-2%)
Antiquated	11%	(+7%)
Trustworthy	9%	(-2%)
Shows leadership	8%	(-4%)
Supportive	8%	(-5%)
Fair	8%	(-3%)

Green indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-19:

Perceptions of the Dental 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=464	2019 N=453
Bureaucratic	32%	43%
Regulators	39%	40%
Necessary	35%	34%
Administrators	32%	30%
Out of touch	20%	29%
For the public	24%	25%
Decision makers	23%	22%
Rigid	15%	20%
Intimidating	18%	19%
Poor communicators	11%	18%

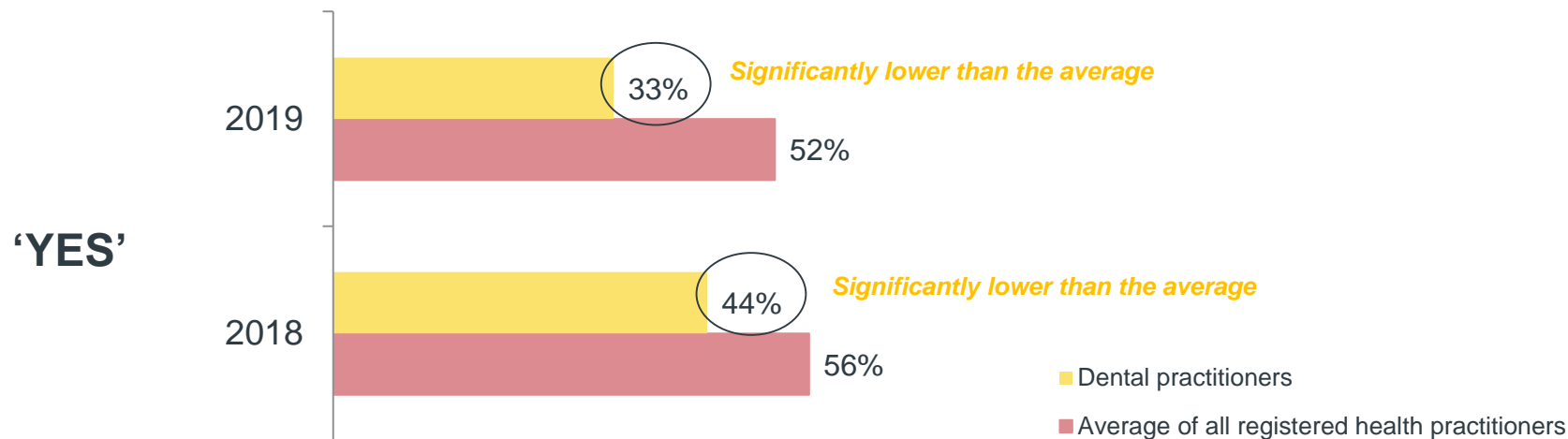
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=464	2019 N=453
Controlling	17%	17%
For practitioners	25%	17%
Secretive	10%	14%
Aloof	9%	13%
Competent	14%	12%
Antiquated	11%	11%
Trustworthy	10%	9%
Shows leadership	7%	8%
Supportive	8%	8%
Fair	11%	8%

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

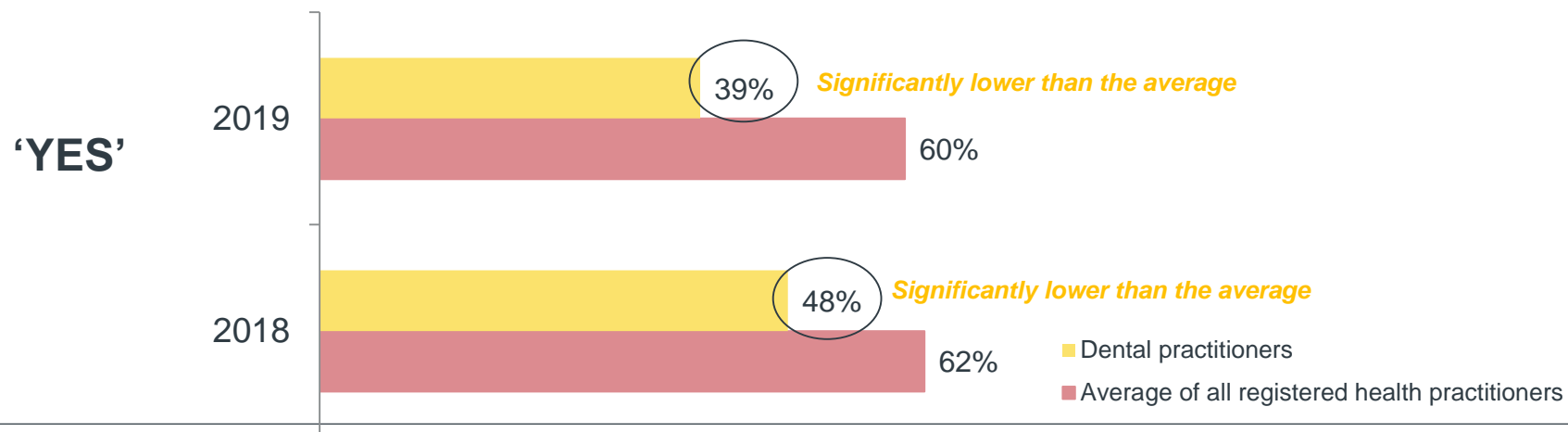
Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*, compared with the 2018 result

Levels of confidence and trust in the Dental 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?



What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Dental Board of Australia

Indicators of trust: **39% trust the Board**

Over many years they have shown a supportive and fair way of upholding the professional practice of dentistry.

I have no evidence they are not doing what they are supposed to do.

They are there to do a job which they are authorised by legislation to do.

The Board has an important but difficult role to play in regulating the registration and competence of practitioners.

It has its history within the profession and has always acted to uphold the image of the profession and the best interests of the public.

Experienced professionals keeping our industry professional, respectful and respected.

They have been approachable anytime needed. They have always had the dental profession in their best interests.

Of my limited dealings I found them professional and fair. From the newsletters the board gives the impression of being trustworthy.

Full list of responses provided separately

Barriers to trust: **32% DO NOT trust the Board**

The Dental Board of Australia does not have enough registered dental practitioners on the Board. The appointment of too many lay people, who do not understand the science of dentistry.

It has made poor choices in the past with regards to the intake of overseas qualified personnel and numbers of students training in Australia.

Lack of clear standards and guidelines, compared to the General Dental Council of the UK.

They are secretive. They won't respond to requests for clarification or give evidence to back up their decisions. I believe there are conflicts of interest between the DBA and university staff.

De-regulation of dentistry has replaced professionalism and ethics with commercialism, deceit, fraud, competition and greed.

Most complaints have no base, yet the Dental Board's approach is just the opposite. The onus of proof seems to get reversed against the practitioner and the whole process is too lengthy.

2019: Perceptions of Ahpra among dental practitioners (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=453)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Bureaucratic	51%	(+12%)
Regulators	49%	(-5%)
Administrators	46%	(-1%)
For the public	38%	(+2%)
Necessary	30%	(-6%)
Out of touch	27%	(+14%)
Intimidating	22%	(+7%)
Controlling	22%	(+7%)
Poor communicators	22%	(+7%)
Rigid	21%	(+5%)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Decision makers	19%	(-2%)
Secretive	16%	(+8%)
For practitioners	15%	(-12%)
Aloof	15%	(+7%)
Accessible	9%	(-1%)
Competent	8%	(-4%)
Fair	8%	(-2%)
Zealous	8%	(+4%)
Antiquated	7%	(+4%)
Trustworthy	7%	(-2%)

Green indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-19:

Perceptions of Ahpra among dental practitioners

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 the Ahpra	2018 N=464	2019 N=453
Bureaucratic	45%	51%
Regulators	45%	49%
Administrators	48%	46%
For the public	39%	38%
Necessary	33%	30%
Out of touch	21%	27%
Intimidating	23%	22%
Controlling	22%	22%
Poor communicators	15%	22%
Rigid	17%	21%

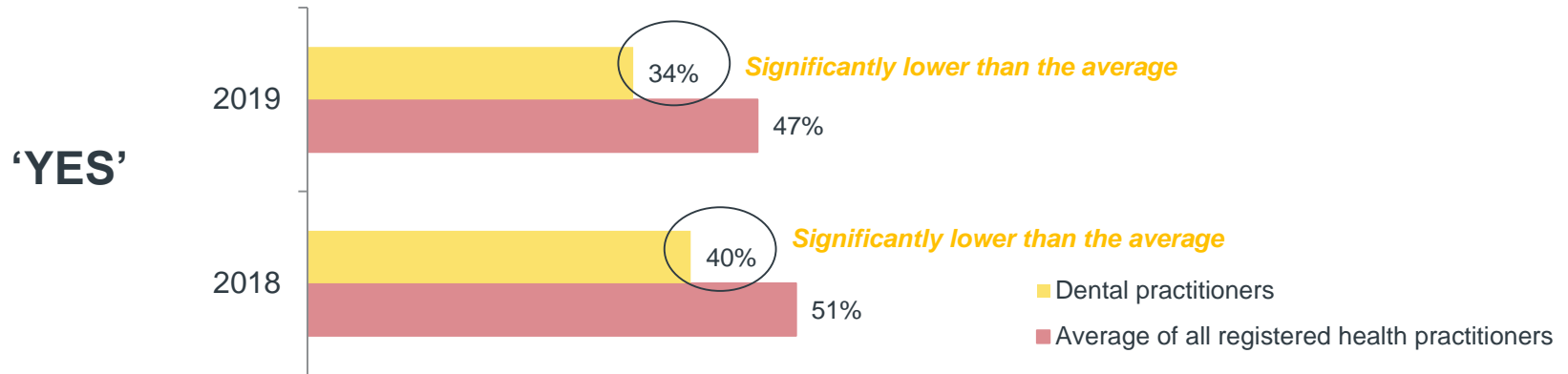
% of practitioners with that perception of the Ahpra	2018 N=464	2019 N=453
Decision makers	17%	19%
Secretive	10%	16%
For practitioners	20%	15%
Aloof	9%	15%
Accessible	13%	9%
Competent	11%	8%
Fair	11%	8%
Zealous	6%	8%
Antiquated	4%	7%
Trustworthy	7%	7%

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

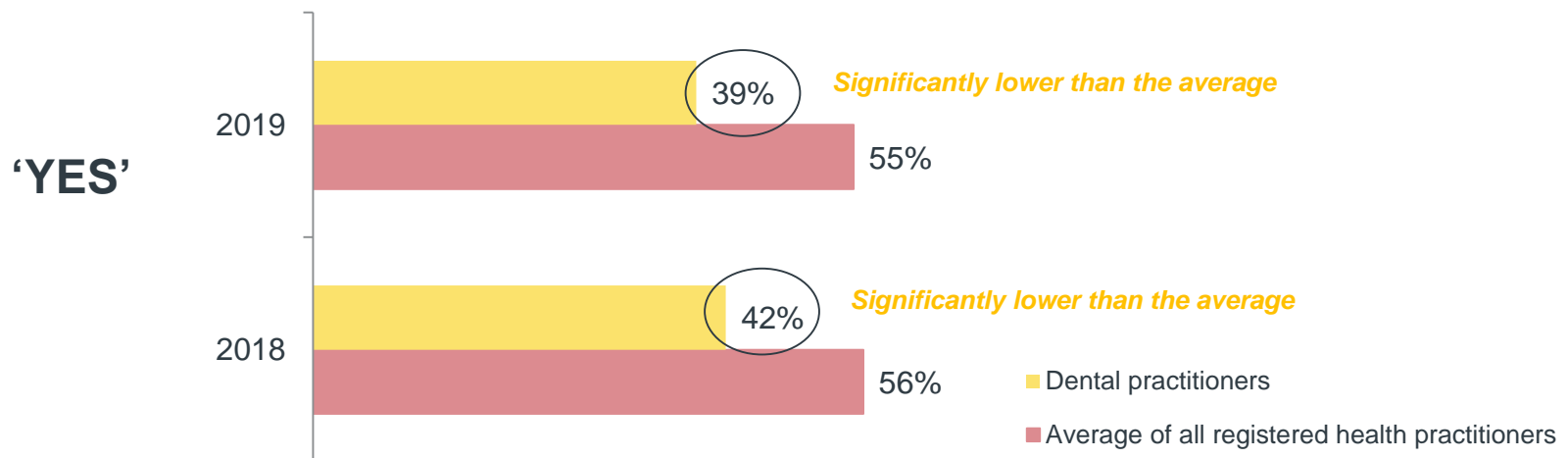
Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*. compared with the 2018 result

Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among dental practitioners

Q. Do you feel confident that **Ahpra** is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust **Ahpra**?



What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in Ahpra among dental practitioners

Indicators of trust: 39% trust Ahpra

I have no evidence to the contrary.

Ahpra fulfill an important but difficult role. I have found them to be reasonable and approachable in my dealings with them.

It responds quickly and objectively. It is government regulated and will thus be accountable.

They have systems in place to look after both the public and the professionals. So when these systems are working the process is fair.

One would like to believe that they are a very professional body representing a multitude of individuals and medically associated professions and therefore are to be trusted.

They have always been transparent with me. Mostly I can see most decisions made by Ahpra are positive.

Because they have been shown to be responsive to poor practitioner behaviour in the past, but they should be doing more.

Barriers to trust: 32% DO NOT trust Ahpra

They are overseeing such an assortment of professions - they have no understanding of dentistry.

Intimidating and put massive pressure on practitioners from even minor complaints or vexatious complaints.

I pay them a huge amount of money and see they have lovely offices and comfortable jobs for them, but the standards of my profession are being decimated on their watch. Also I'm highly regulated as a dental practitioner with a lot of costs and responsibilities. Other health professions have much lower registration.

They over regulate registered practitioners while doing nothing about non-registered persons actively providing dental treatments. Additionally, there are no restrictions on the advertising of these people.

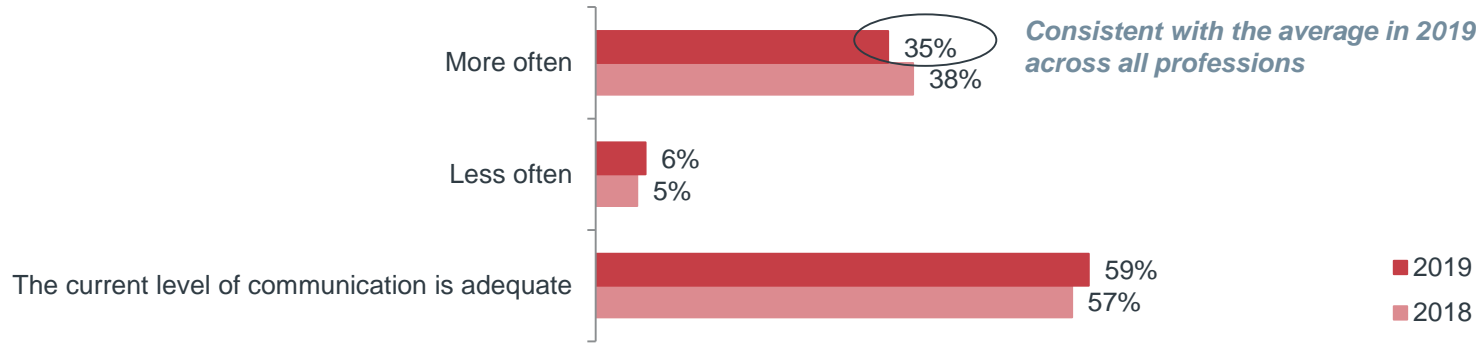
Has very little power to crack down on rogue and dishonest practitioners.

Know of delays in investigating breaches placing public at risk.

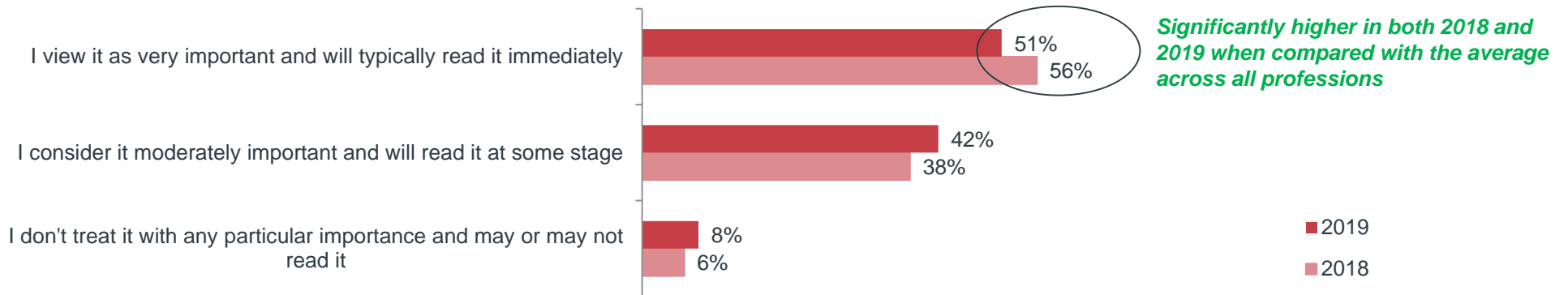
Full list of responses provided separately

Response to communication by the Dental Board of Australia

Q. Would you like (National Board) to communicate with you.....?



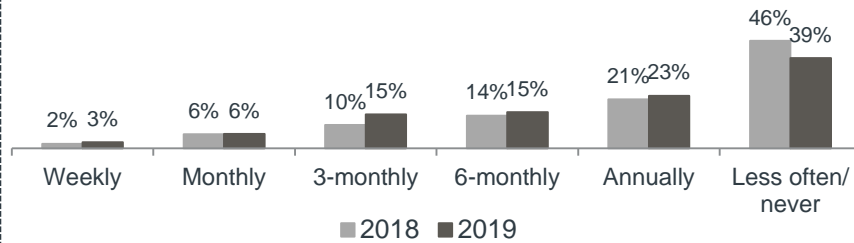
Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

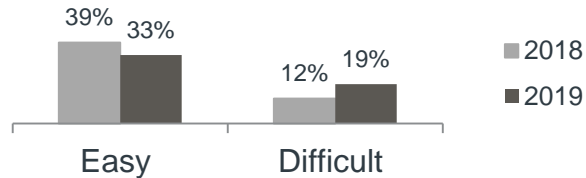
Use of the Dental Board of Australia website

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



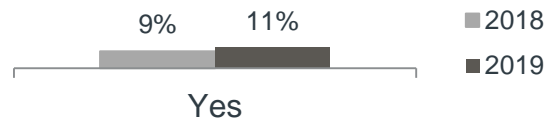
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this board

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



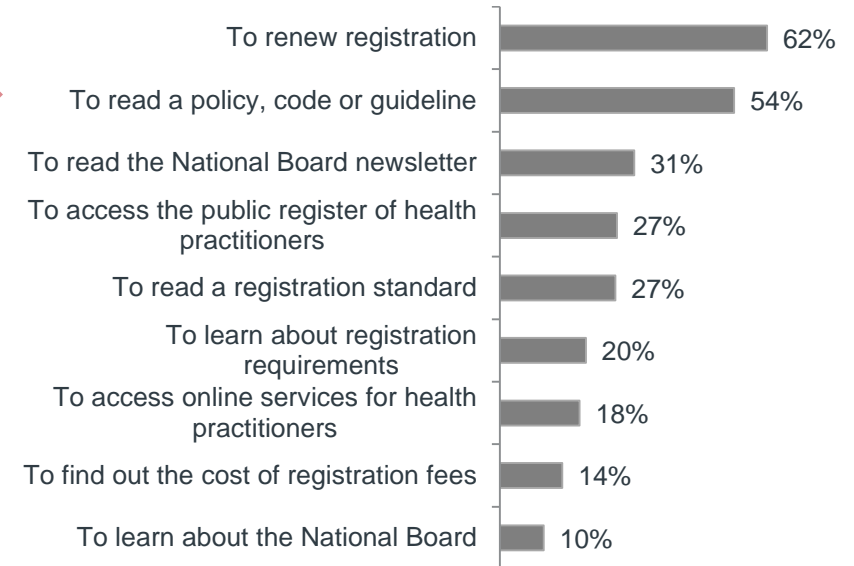
Base: Practitioners who have visited that board's website

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

2019: Reasons for visiting the National Board website



Additional information sought by practitioners included (but was not limited to)...

- Latest documents for standards for dental equipment.
- Clear guidance on CPD requirements.
- Practice accreditation requirements.
- Board member costs.
- All current members, their qualifications and terms.
- Information on historic judgements.

Additional feedback from dental practitioners

Sample of open-ended responses when invited to comment about overall perception of Ahpra and/or the National Board *(full list of responses provided separately)*

I have several colleagues that have had a very stressful time awaiting outcomes of complaints due to long time span.

Extremely expensive for questionable benefit. Fails to regulate things like shopping centre tooth whitening and direct-to-consumer orthodontics yet is onerous on actual qualified dental practitioners.

The ADC needs to maintain its high standards in preventing inappropriately skilled overseas trained dentists from practising here.

Ahpra compliance officers are wooden and inflexible. Need to take into consideration that not all situations are black and white. Also need to resolve issues with expediency as the wait has an emotional and psychological toll on practitioners.

Too much of the wrong kind of regulation. A self supporting and self-serving bureaucracy to the detriment of the professions and professionalism and ultimately the general public we tried to serve.

It has been a very disappointing last few years on how you have handled issues for the profession. I feel the Dental Board has certainly been out of touch with the practising dentists. The therapist extended scope has been a failed issue, followed by direct to consumer dentistry which you have palmed off to the ACCC.

Why do we have Ahpra, Dental Board of Australia AND Dental Council of NSW? There should just be Ahpra.

Ahpra needs to be more knowledgeable about a profession when dealing with a complaint instead of having admin staff respond in a bureaucratic manner.

The Dental Board is too secretive and the information it does release publicly is limited. For example, the meeting minutes are full of nothing.

I feel that the Dental Board does not protect the public, but merely follows a political path with the aim of downgrading the dental profession, in the misguided belief that more competition will lower fees.

I feel that the Boards and Ahpra are one sided; more about protecting the public than protecting the practitioners. We are just as important as the public and should be at least treated equally.

I feel they are intimidating and if I did have a problem, I don't see them as supportive. I see their findings as often inconsistent.

