

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Thursday 19 November 2020. The meeting was chaired by Nello Marino from the Australian Podiatry Association.

The Professions Reference Group discussed the following.

- Ahpra marked NAIDOC Week 2020 with the release of an inaugural [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2020-2025](#), which has a goal of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation among Ahpra staff and the National Boards.
- Ahpra released its [2019/20 annual report](#) highlighting its regulatory work in partnership with National Boards and the National Scheme's response to the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ahpra continued its work and services during the required public health restrictions.
- More than 3,000 (or 10 per cent) of practitioners on the pandemic response sub-register have responded to a survey that asked about their experience. Ahpra is now studying the data as part of the evaluation of the sub-register.
- Australia's health ministers have announced the appointment of three new members to the [Ahpra Agency Management Committee](#) for the next three years.
- Adjunct Professor Veronica Casey AM has been appointed as the new Chair of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) bringing her experience of running large health services in Queensland. The significant contribution of outgoing NMBA Chair Associate Professor Lynette Cusack, who has been a member of the Board since inception of the National Scheme, was acknowledged by the group.
- Work by jurisdictions is continuing on proposed National Law amendments, with an amendment bill potentially being considered by the Queensland Parliament later in 2021. Members were also briefed on the potential implications of [Peter Conran's Review of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums](#).
- PRG members were updated on the progress of several Royal Commissions, including advice recently provided to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability by the Dental, Medical, Nursing and Midwifery Boards. It was also noted that the Counsel Assisting made its final submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and published several recommendations relevant to the National Scheme.
- The renewal period for allied health professions (registration expiring on 30 November 2020) is well on track, with application numbers just slightly ahead at the same time last year.
- Work continues on ensuring that efforts in managing practitioner notifications are focused on high-risk matters and getting the low-risk matters addressed more quickly.
- Ahpra has developed *A framework for identifying and dealing with vexatious notifications* for staff and regulatory decision-makers, to help identify and manage potentially vexatious notifications. It was developed following recommendations from the *Reducing, identifying and managing vexatious complaints report* published in 2017 and the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman's review of the *Confidentiality safeguards for notifiers* in 2019. Targeted consultation has been completed and an initial version of a framework will be published via a dedicated webpage in the Ahpra website. (See more on [Vexatious notifications](#).)
- National Boards and Ahpra have finalised a joint review of the *Guidelines for advertising regulated health services* and the new guidelines will take effect on 14 December 2020.

- Ahpra is seeking to explore ways where the [Taking care](#) podcast episodes can be useful to PRG members and their networks as an ongoing engagement resource rather than just as a broadcast channel. This can be done via sharing of the podcasts as a free resource to health practitioners, feature interesting practitioners or get feedback about common questions, themes or topics that are coming up with practitioners and could benefit from a podcast episode.

Other business

The next scheduled meeting is on Wednesday 10 March 2021.

The Chair expressed optimism in the meetings despite the turbulent circumstances brought by COVID-19.

Nello Marino

Chair
Professions Reference Group