

Communiqué

August and September 2021 meetings of the Dental Board of Australia

The Dental Board of Australia (the Board) held its 132nd and 133rd meetings on Friday 27 August and Thursday 23 September respectively. The Board and its committees continue to meet via video conferencing since March 2020.

This communiqué highlights the key discussions and considerations covered during the Board meetings and other relevant information. We publish this communiqué on our website and email it to a broad range of stakeholders. We encourage you to distribute it to colleagues and interested parties, including within your work or organisation.

Appointments to the Conscious sedation advisory panel

The Board's Conscious sedation advisory panel was established to provide the Board with advice and make recommendations to the Board on matters relating to endorsement in the area of conscious sedation. With member terms due to expire, the Board agreed to undertake an Expression of Interest (EoI) process to appoint members to the Panel for a coming term. Appointments were finalised in September with new terms to commence September 23. The Board welcomes new members and thanks retiring members for the significant contribution they have made to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme as a member of the CSAP. The skills, wisdom, experience and insight members brought to the CSAP have played an important role in the protection of the public and the regulation of the profession.

2021 renewals and CPD requirements in COVID-19 environment

Dental practitioners have until 30 November 2021 to renew their general or non-practising registration. As part of renewal, practitioners are asked to declare whether they have complied with the CPD requirements attached to registration.

Practitioners are expected to make reasonable efforts to complete required CPD, however the Board understands that some practitioners may have had trouble fully meeting CPD, particularly any face to face requirements, due to the impacts of COVID-19. Continuing professional development is important as it helps maintain competence and supports safe and effective care.

The Board agreed that it will not take action if practitioners have not been able to complete CPD for the 2020 – 2021 registration period due to the exceptional circumstances of COVID-19.

Practitioners who hold an endorsement to practise conscious sedation have an additional professional obligation to meet CPD requirements under the Endorsement for conscious sedation registration standard (the standard). The Board's news item about [Endorsement to practise conscious sedation during COVID-19 contains more](#) information about this.

Dental Board holds its national conference

The Board held its fifth biennial national conference online on 16 and 17 September.

The conference was an ideal opportunity for the Board to share ideas and vision and to engage and collaborate with our partners involved in regulating dental practitioners.

The meeting brought together Board members and national committee members, Ahpra senior staff and key external stakeholders such as representatives of the Australian Dental Council, the Dental Council of New South Wales, the Office of the Health Ombudsman (QLD) and the Health Professional Councils Authority (NSW).

The keynote address by Emeritus Professor Arie Freiberg AM, a member of the Agency Management Committee, Professor Freiberg discussed the regulatory framework within the context of the National Law.

He considered what regulation is, why, and how we regulate. His address touched on the forms regulation can take: prescriptive, performance and principles-based regulation and how this applies to dental regulation.

Emeritus Professor Freiberg previously held the position of Dean of the Law Faculty at Monash University and was a member of the Interim Advisory Board of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) in Victoria. He has consulted for a number of organisations on regulatory matters, is the academic adviser to the Australia and New Zealand School of Government's National Regulators Community of Practice and is the author of the textbooks *The tools of regulation* and *Regulation in Australia*.

The conference sessions also covered:

- Ahpra's work on engagement and building trust
- how the Board can support cultural safety in dental practice and what cultural safety means to those in the field
- revised Regulatory principles and how we apply them in practice
- how the Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner are used across the sector, and
- a discussion about the level and standard of quality of practice we are regulating.

Public consultation - review of Guidelines on infection control

Following the outcomes of preliminary consultation on the review of the Guidelines on Infection Control, the Board agreed to the release of the public consultation paper. Public consultation closes on 15 November 2021.

Part of the Board's role, as outlined in the National Law, is to set registration standards for dental practitioners, and to develop codes and regulatory guidelines for the profession. The Board first published the Guidelines on infection control in 2010 to set out the obligations of dental practitioners for maintaining good infection prevention and control. These are now due for scheduled review to ensure continued relevance in a dynamic regulatory environment.

As set out in the National Law under section 39, regulatory guidelines are by their very nature prescriptive documents as they can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. They must conform with legal requirements and are not easily amended – they can take a long time to review and update. As a result, it can be challenging to respond to changing contexts, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Board does not issue guidelines (under section 39) about specific areas of clinical practice.

The Board is proposing to replace the guidelines with resources to help practitioners comply with their obligations and promote and support practitioners to practise professionally. This would mean that the Board can be more responsive and update material more quickly reducing unnecessary regulatory burden. Information is available on the [Board's current consultation web page](#).

Stress and burnout amongst Australian dental practitioners – research study

The Board noted a research study underway to explore the social, work and mental health effects experienced by dental professionals in Australia, and to examine factors that promote good mental health and risk factors that contribute to poorer mental health.

The dental profession has long been regarded as having high levels of professional stress and burnout, however the mental health of Australian dentists has been studied sporadically over the past few decades. The research team, led by A/Prof Matt Hopcraft (University of Melbourne) in conjunction Prof Gordon Parker AO (University of New South Wales), Dr Roisin McGrath (University of Melbourne) and Dr Nicole Stormon (University of Queensland), is conducting the study.

The online questionnaire should take no more than 15-20 minutes. Participation is voluntary and is available to all dental practitioners through the following link https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/dental_burnout

This project has human research ethics approval from The University of Melbourne (Project ID 21897).

Dental Practitioner Support service

Support for dental practitioners who need someone to talk to is just a quick phone call or click away.

Dental Practitioner Support is a national 24/7 health and wellbeing support service for all dental practitioners. Anyone using it does not have to give their name and can seek support anonymously.

The service offers health and wellbeing support to all dental practitioners, including dentists, dental prosthetists, oral health therapists, dental hygienists and dental therapists. It is also available to dental students, educators, employers, Australian Dental Council exam candidates and concerned family members and friends.

While funded by the Board, the service is run independently by [Turning Point](#), a leading addiction treatment, research and education organisation based in Victoria. This means practitioners can have complete confidence in reaching out for confidential support.

Access Dental Practitioner Support:

- 1800 377 700
- dpsupport.org.au

We ask all our stakeholders to continue to promote the service widely.

Are your contact details up to date?

Your contact details must be up to date to receive renewal reminders from Ahpra and information from the Board. You can check your details via the login icon at the top right of the [Ahpra website](#). Your email settings may need to be changed to receive emails from Ahpra or the Board and to avoid misdirection to junk mail.

Conclusion

The Board publishes a range of information about registration and the Board's expectations of practitioners on its website at www.dentalboard.gov.au or www.ahpra.gov.au. More information on the Board's work is also available in the Board's regular newsletter. Read the latest edition, [March 2021](#).

For more information about or help with regulatory issues, please send an [online enquiry form](#) or contact Ahpra on 1300 419 495.

Dr Murray Thomas

Chair, Dental Board of Australia

September 2021