

# Ahpra

## Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2020

A Social Research Project

November 2020

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 them 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.

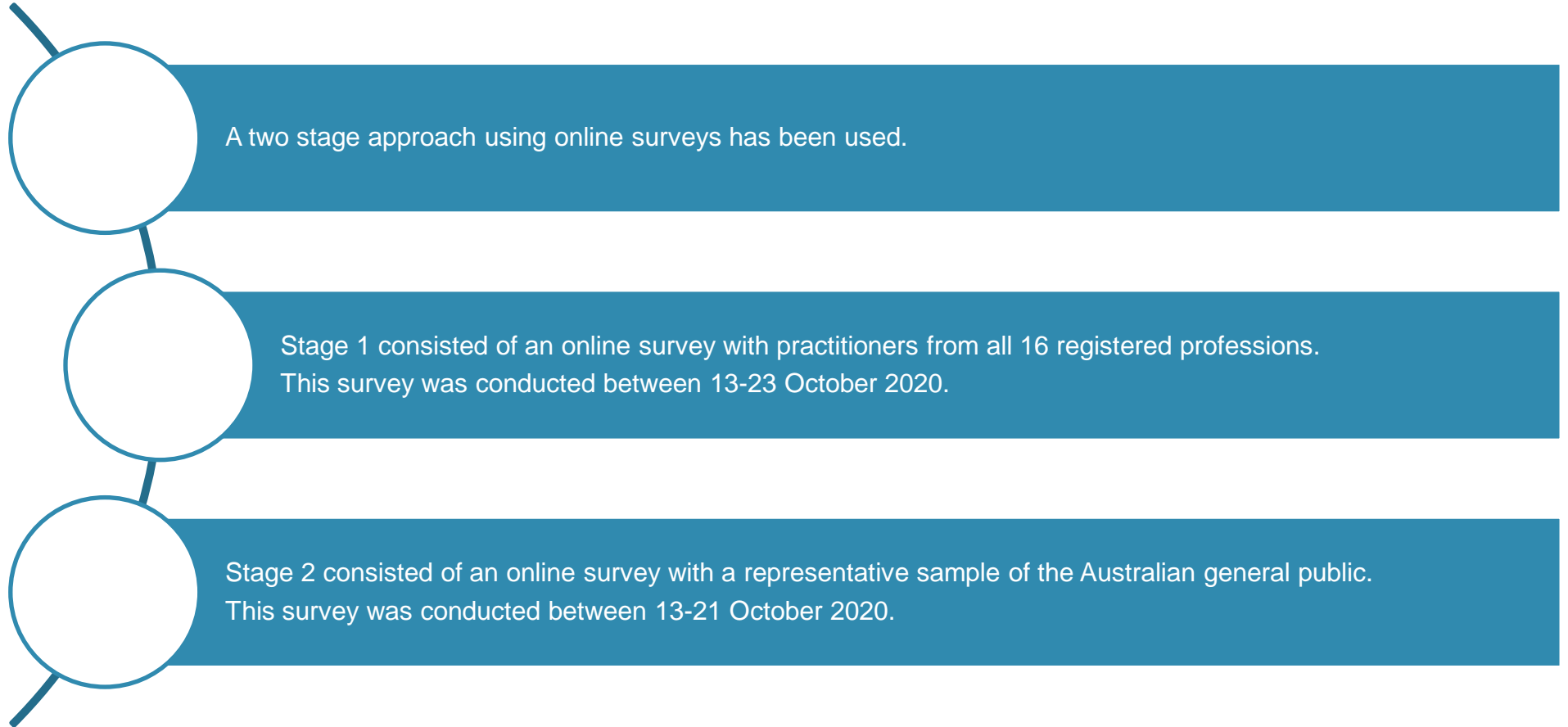
Given the value of the insights delivered through the 2018 benchmark study to Ahpra and National Boards, the decision was taken to update the quantitative measures by conducting the online survey with practitioners and the general public in November 2019 and most recently in October 2020.

The purpose of this report is to present, discuss and consolidate the findings and insights from the 2020 surveys and to make comparisons, where appropriate, with the 2018 and 2019 results.

- 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

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# Quantitative approach

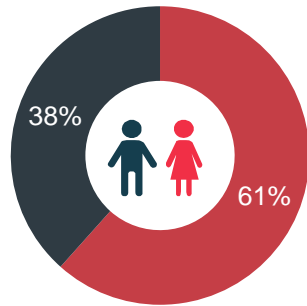
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community.
- The 2020 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 and 2019 questionnaires, with two additional questions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider. Quotas were placed 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	13-21 October	13-23 October
Responses	2,020	10,228
Email invitations sent	na	138,453
Response rate	na	7.4%

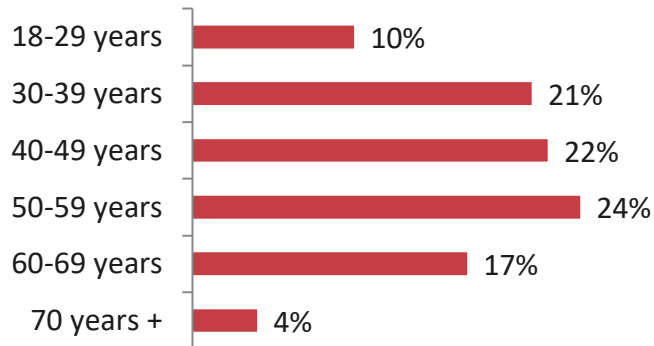


# 2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

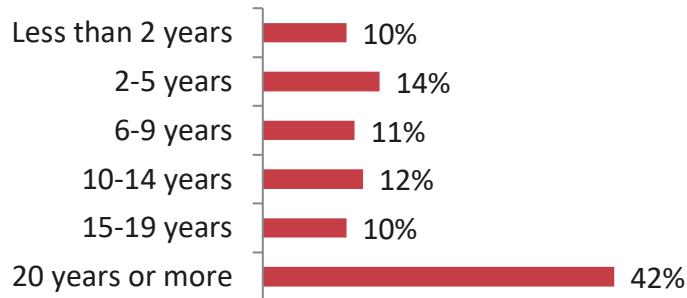
## Gender



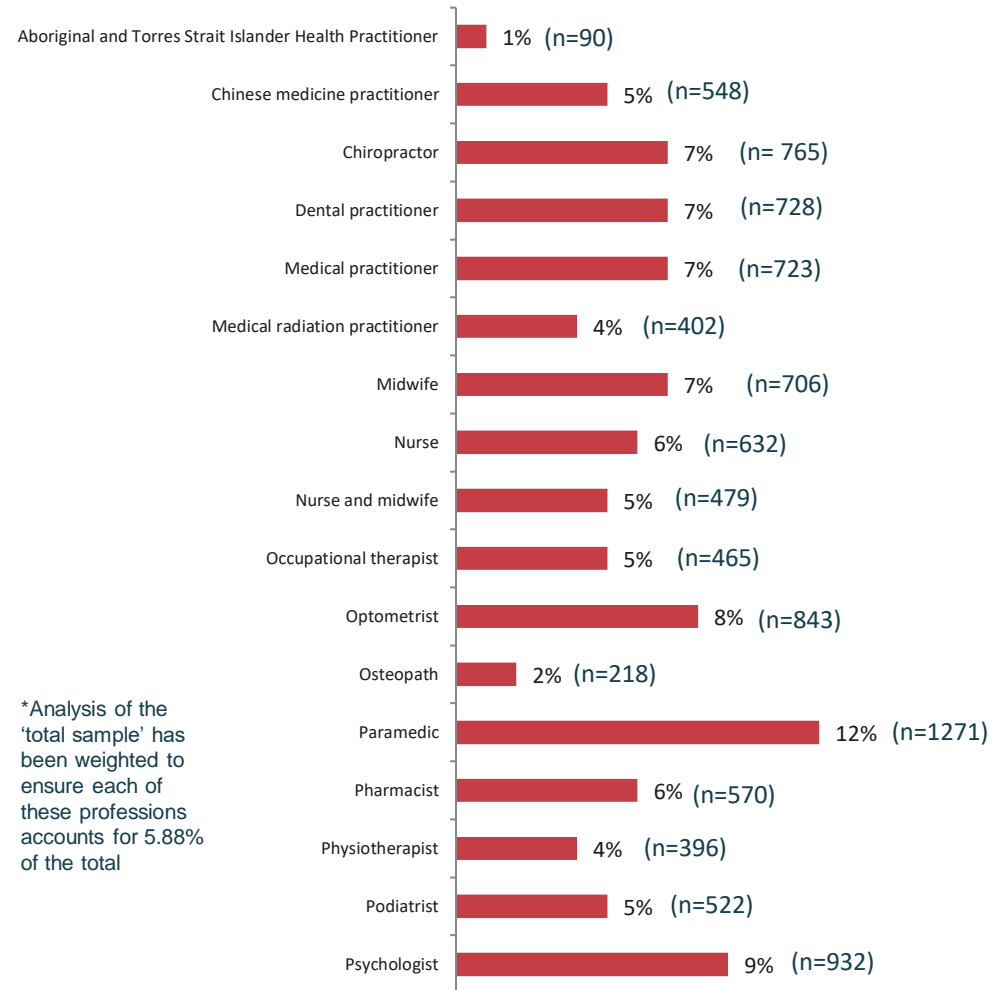
## Age



## Years in practice



## Practitioner type\*

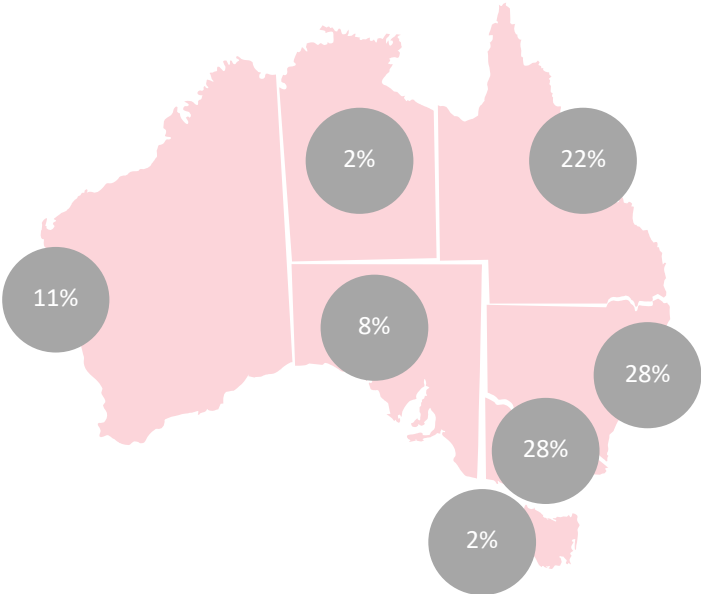


\*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

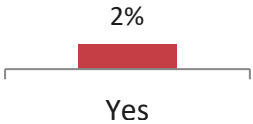
# 2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

## Location

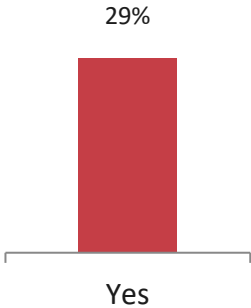


Metro: **63%**  
Regional: **30%**  
Rural: **7%**

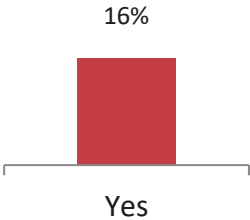
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



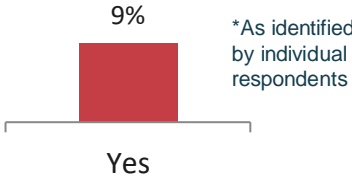
% who were born in a country other than Australia



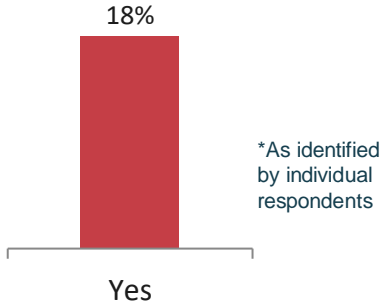
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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\*

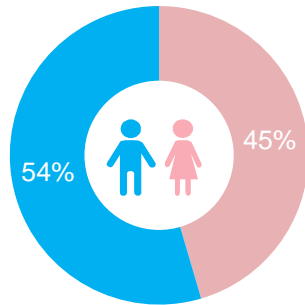


# Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners

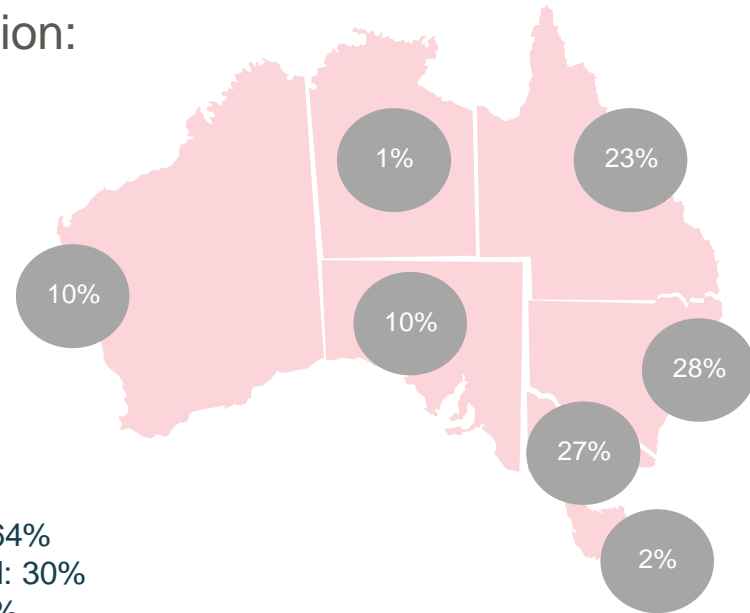
Specific insights into the responses from:  
**Dental practitioners**

# Sample of dental practitioners (n=605)

## Gender:

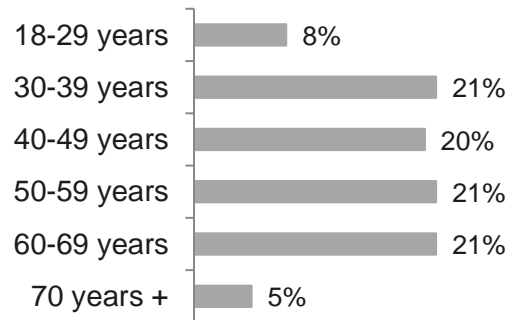


## Location:

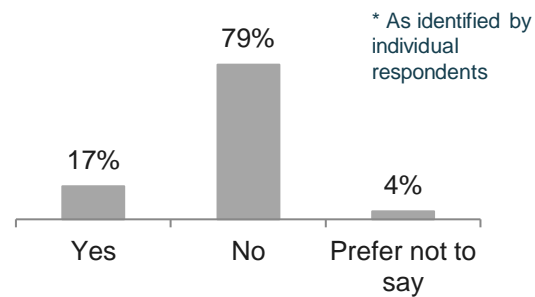


Metro: 64%  
Regional: 30%  
Rural: 6%

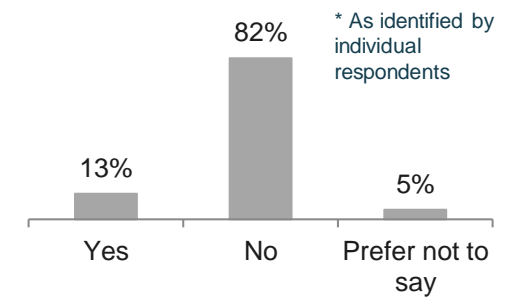
## Age:



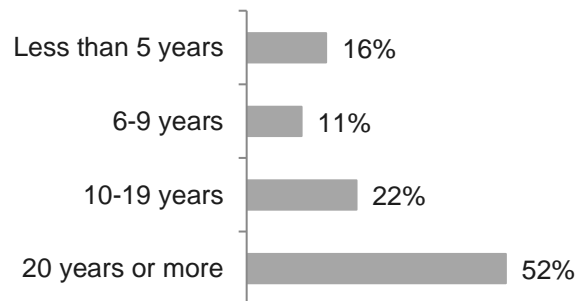
% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board\*



% who have been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards\*



## Years in practice:





## 2020: 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=605)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	56%	(+10%)
Hard working	31%	(+2%)
Knowledgeable	29%	(-1%)
Responsible	25%	(+6%)
Caring	25%	(-3%)
Competent	22%	(+2%)
Respected	21%	(+1%)
Dedicated	20%	(-1%)
Trusted	18%	(-5%)
Empathetic	16%	(-4%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Reputable	14%	(+4%)
Compassionate	13%	(-10%)
Committed	13%	(-4%)
Independent	13%	(+5%)
Team oriented	12%	(+3%)
Honest	11%	(+2%)
Passionate	9%	(-5%)
Community minded	8%	(-7%)
Successful	8%	(+5%)
Intimidating	6%	(+5%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

# Summary of changes 2019-20:

## Perceptions of the dental profession

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with your profession?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=453	2020 N=605
Professional	58%	56%
Hard working	35%	31%
Knowledgeable	31%	29%
Responsible	26%	25%
Caring	24%	25%
Competent	22%	22%
Respected	21%	21%
Dedicated	18%	20%
Trusted	19%	18%
Empathetic	14%	16%

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=453	2020 N=605
Reputable	14%	14%
Compassionate	15%	13%
Committed	15%	13%
Independent	10%	13%
Team oriented	12%	12%
Honest	13%	11%
Passionate	9%	9%
Community minded	10%	8%
Successful	5%	8%
Intimidating	7%	6%

**Green** indicates a result significantly higher result in 2020 compared with the 2019 result.

**Orange** indicates a result significantly lower result compared with the 2019 result

Note: There have been no significant changes in perceptions of the profession among dental practitioners between 2019-2020

## 2020: 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=605)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Bureaucratic	39%	(+14%)
Regulators	41%	(+3%)
Administrators	32%	(-1%)
Necessary	28%	(-3%)
For the public	23%	(+2%)
Decision-makers	23%	(-)
Out of touch	22%	(+12%)
Poor communicators	19%	(+10%)
Intimidating	17%	(+9%)
For practitioners	16%	(-15%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Controlling	14%	(+6%)
Aloof	14%	(+7%)
Secretive	13%	(+8%)
Rigid	13%	(+4%)
Competent	11%	(-4%)
Trustworthy	10%	(-1%)
Supportive	10%	(-5%)
Fair	9%	(-1%)
Antiquated	8%	(+3%)
Shows leadership	8%	(-5%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 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	2020 N=605
Bureaucratic	32%	43%	39%
Regulators	39%	40%	41%
Administrators	32%	30%	32%
Necessary	35%	34%	28%
For the public	24%	25%	23%
Decision-makers	23%	22%	23%
Out of touch	20%	29%	22%
Poor communicators	11%	18%	19%
Intimidating	18%	19%	17%
For practitioners	25%	17%	16%

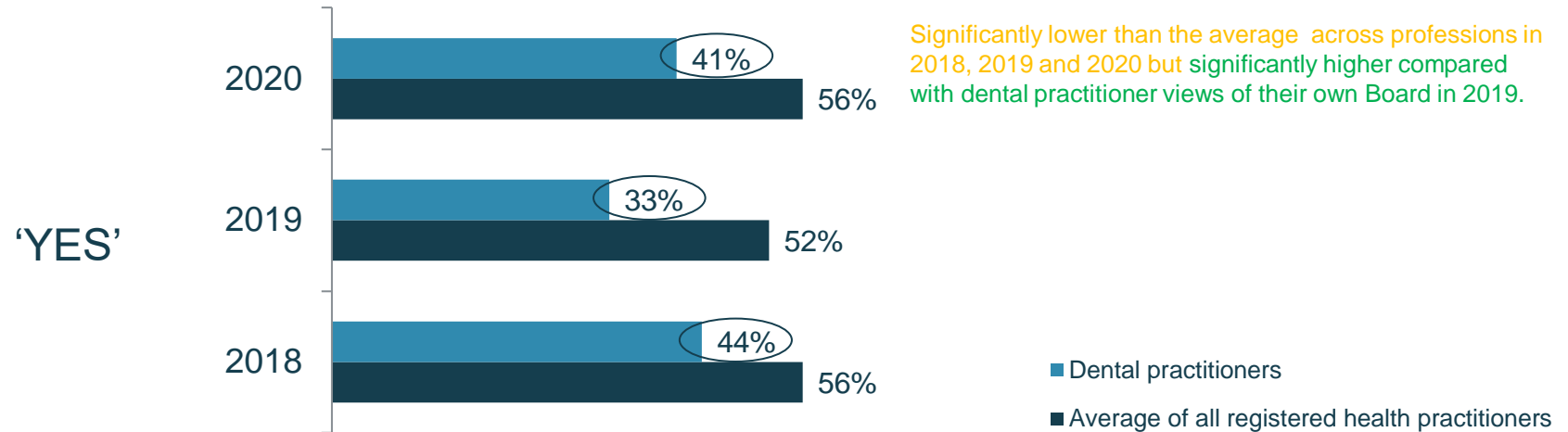
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=464	2019 N=453	2020 N=605
Controlling	17%	17%	14%
Aloof	9%	13%	14%
Secretive	10%	14%	13%
Rigid	15%	20%	13%
Competent	14%	12%	11%
Trustworthy	10%	9%	10%
Supportive	8%	8%	10%
Fair	11%	8%	9%
Antiquated	11%	11%	8%
Shows leadership	7%	8%	8%

Green indicates a result significantly higher result compared with previous years.

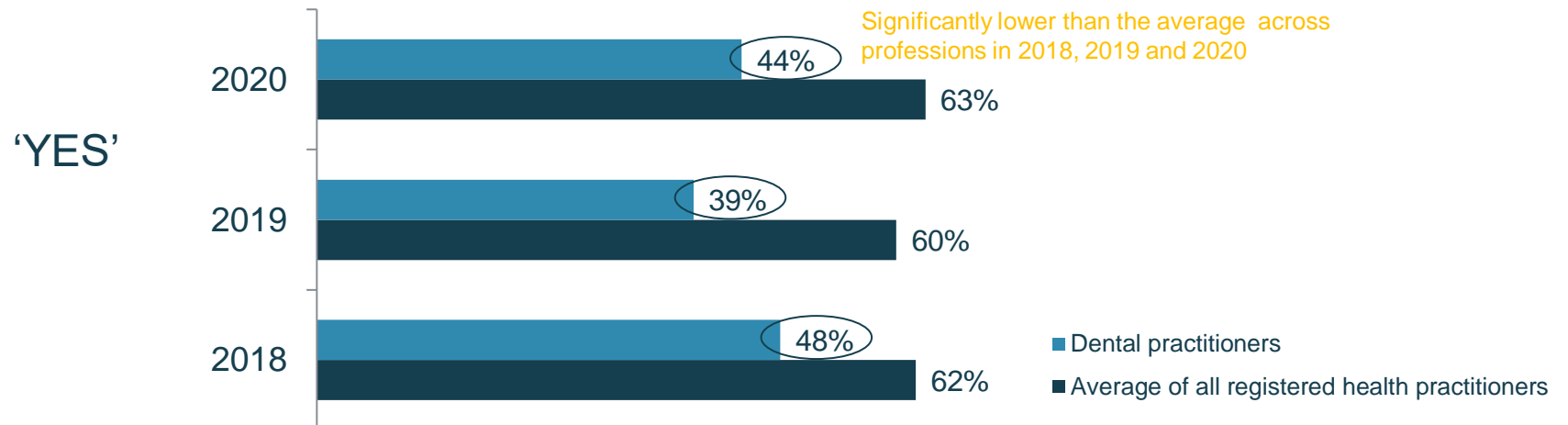
Orange indicates a result significantly lower result compared with previous years.

# 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

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## Indicators of trust: **44% trust the Board**

*Years of consistency.*

*Hopefully they are working with everyone's best interests in mind.*

*It guides the dental profession in legality of practice and national standards of practice.*

*It keeps in touch with practitioners, so it has to know what is happening in the health profession.*

*Professional management.*

*Because they haven't made a wrong decision to make me not trust them.*

*Personnel on the dental board are trustworthy.*

*Reputable and necessary to have a regulatory body to maintain professional standards.*

*Hopefully supporting practitioners and their compliance efforts.*

*They are the only such body in Australia.*

*They have a diverse make up of the board that appear open, informed and current in their thinking.*

*I have faith that they are there to do their job correctly.*

*Protocols in place and consultation procedures suitable for their role.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

## Barriers to trust: **25% DO NOT trust the Board**

*They are fast to regulate health care providers and slow to advocate for health care providers.*

*The personnel involved in the Dental Board are out of touch and have a poor understanding of contemporary practice and of the difference between public and private practice.*

*Good for some dental designations (dentists and specialists) not for oral health therapists.*

*Too bureaucratic.*

*National representation is not fairly allocated. Too many non dentists on the board, and not enough dentists.*

*Charges to scope of practice was not in the best interest of the public.*

*It doesn't listen to the ADA and is totally out of touch with dentists in general.*

*Too weak in managing incompetent practice.*

*Very old fashioned, slow decision making. The recent pandemic has shown a lack of national leadership.*

*Their role is unclear. The DBA was not helpful at all in my opinion during COVID 19. The leadership seems antiquated and poor.*

# 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=605)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	47%	(-6%)
Bureaucratic	46%	(+10%)
Administrators	39%	(-5%)
For the public	36%	(+3%)
Necessary	28%	(-8%)
Controlling	23%	(+11%)
Out of touch	22%	(+10%)
Intimidating	22%	(+7%)
Poor communicators	19%	(+7%)
Decision makers	18%	(-5%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Rigid	17%	(+2%)
For practitioners	16%	(-12%)
Secretive	13%	(+6%)
Aloof	13%	(+6%)
Competent	9%	(-4%)
Supportive	7%	(-1%)
Fair	7%	(-3%)
Trustworthy	7%	(-3%)
Zealous	6%	(+3%)
Antiquated	6%	(-1%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

# Summary of changes 2018-20:

## 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 Ahpra	2018 N=325	2019 N=428	2020 N=605
Regulators	45%	49%	47%
Bureaucratic	45%	51%	46%
Administrators	48%	46%	39%
For the public	39%	38%	36%
Necessary	33%	30%	28%
Controlling	22%	22%	23%
Out of touch	21%	27%	22%
Intimidating	23%	22%	22%
Poor communicators	15%	22%	19%
Decision-makers	17%	19%	18%

% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	2018 N=325	2019 N=428	2020 N=605
Rigid	17%	21%	17%
For practitioners	20%	15%	16%
Secretive	10%	16%	13%
Aloof	9%	15%	13%
Competent	11%	8%	9%
Supportive	6%	4%	7%
Fair	11%	8%	7%
Trustworthy	7%	7%	7%
Zealous	6%	8%	6%
Antiquated	4%	7%	6%

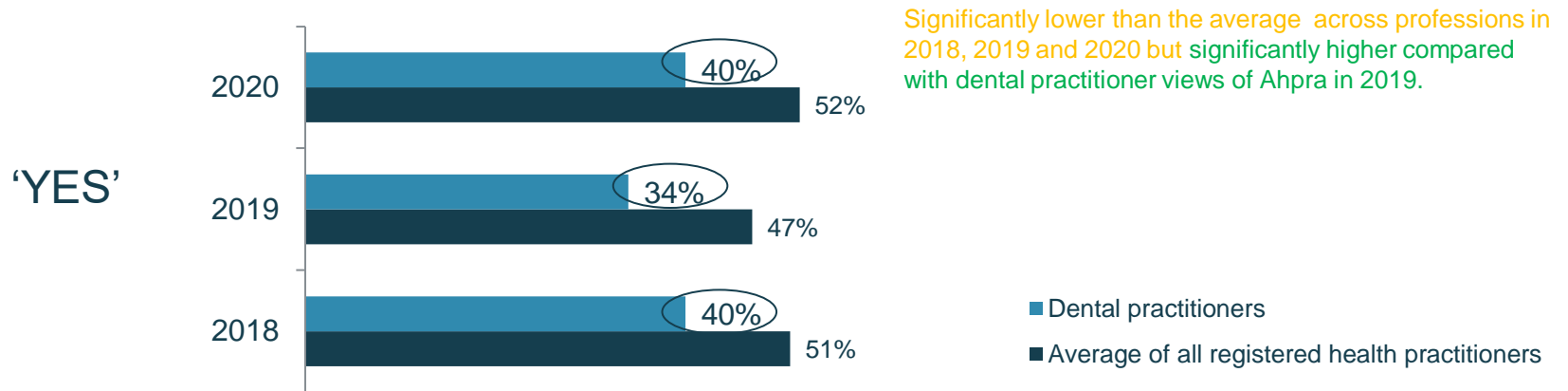
Green indicates a result significantly higher result compared with previous years.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower result compared with previous years.

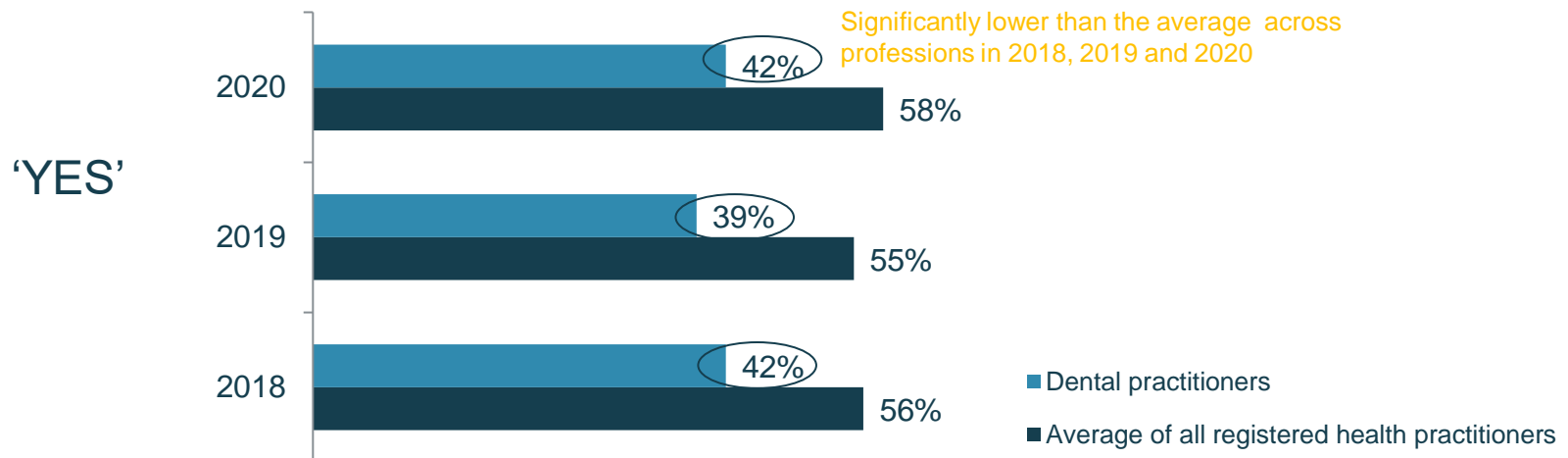


# Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among dental practitioners

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

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## Indicators of trust: 42% trust Ahpra

*Processes exist to ensure that practitioners are practicing safely. There is governance that is external to the profession itself.*

*They control nationwide health practice standards and community health safety.*

*It keeps in touch with practitioners.*

*Strict and consistent regulations.*

*They seem to be very good at keeping on top of everything and haven't done anything to make me not trust them.*

*Well respected.*

*Ahpra is efficient and effective in controlling the management of the medical professions.*

*They maintain a high standard for professional credibility.*

*They appear to be holding the public's best interests by making practitioners accountable for breaches in best practice and where there are concerns of a clinician's ability.*

*The peak body responsible for practitioner accountability.*

*In the time I have been associated with Ahpra I found them very professional.*

## Barriers to trust: 28% DO NOT trust Ahpra

*Too political.*

*I have heard experiences where Ahpra does not help the dental health professionals*

*They are too lenient on other dental practitioners who are not keeping to the industry standard.*

*It is too bureaucratic & impersonal.*

*It is very bureaucratic, useless, and only exists to get more revenue for the government.*

*Inadequate knowledge to regulate clinicians.*

*Only administrators to collect fees, without any real knowledge of the profession.*

*An incredible amount of compliance that is difficult to understand, fear of being accused of non-compliance despite vigilant efforts.*

*Overlooking too many different types of practitioners.*

*Too easy to report on a practitioner and cause significant stress with no consequences for false complaints.*

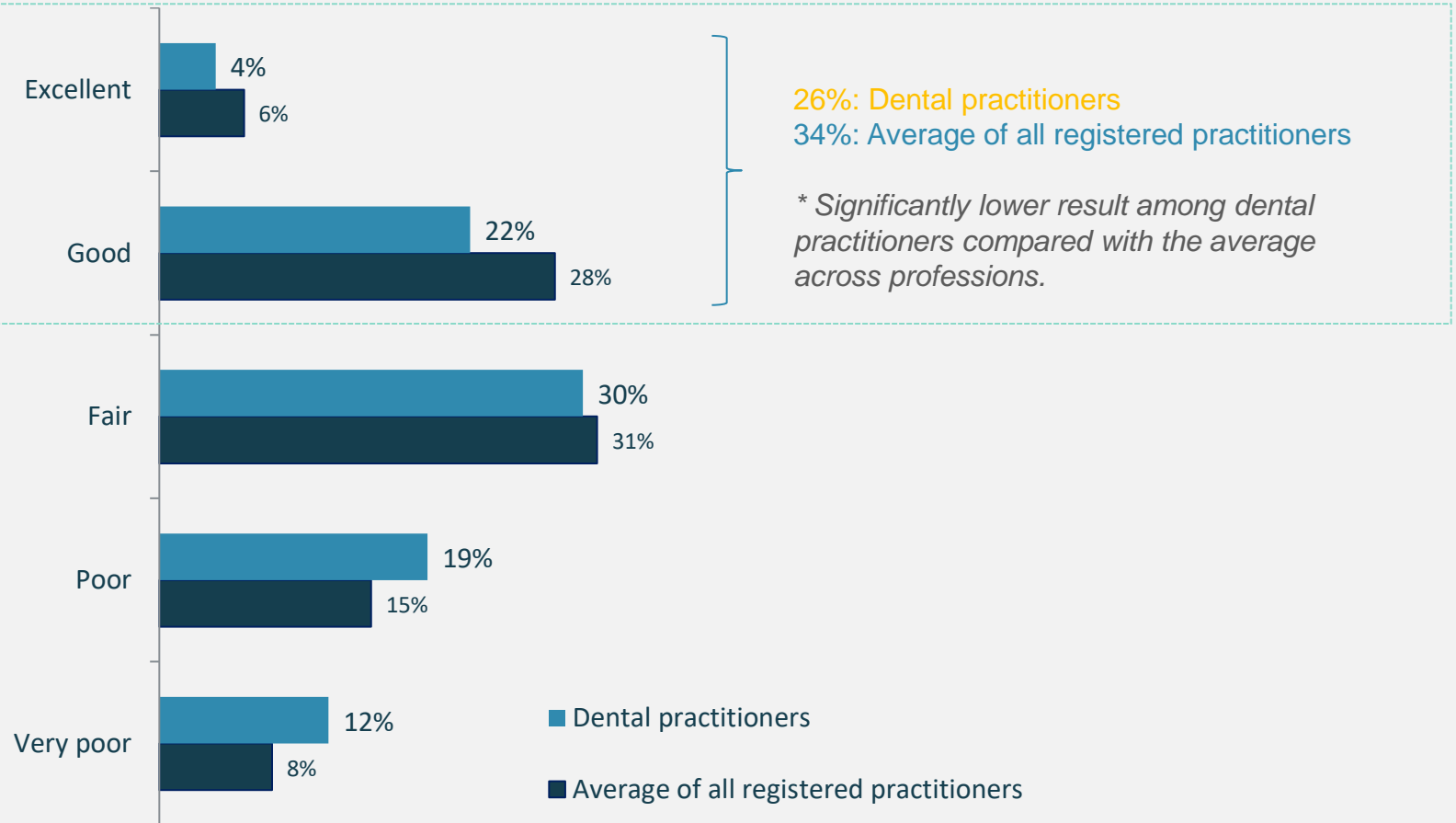
*Appalling practitioners are allowed to practice, yet slight breaches are zealously prosecuted.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

# Assessment of the level of support provided to practitioners from Ahpra and National Boards to maintain their professional practice

Q. How would you rate the level of support provided by National Boards and Ahpra for you to maintain or improve your professional practice?

## Dental practitioners



# Additional activities or support practitioners would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or the National Boards during the pandemic

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**Practitioners were asked what additional activities or support, if any, they would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or their National Board during the pandemic? Below is a sample of the open-ended responses provided.**

*(Full list of responses provided separately).*

*Relief of registration renewals.*

*Proper guidance when it was needed.*

*Reduce the registration fees, as we have been out of work for a long time, especially in Victoria.*

*Show leadership in areas of practice during pandemics.*

*Focus on disciplining practitioners operating contrary to Covid risk level restrictions on practice.*

*Clearer definitive directions and more responsive to the changing needs between different levels of restrictions. Stricter consequences for those practitioners who do not comply and place the public at risk.*

*Better communication to practitioners.*

*Give us more solid advice on what we can and cannot practice during restrictions.*

*To have shown leadership and some guidance - I felt that I received more support and guidance from the Australian Dental Association. They were always keeping me up to date with information and providing the resources to help guide me through. I recall maybe one or two emails from the Dental Board mostly after the fact.*

*Up to date webinars on how to keep ourselves, our staff and our patients safe. Webinars on mental health and well being. Webinars on current guidelines and restrictions as they occurred.*

*Providing state-based courses to replace national ones during border closures.*

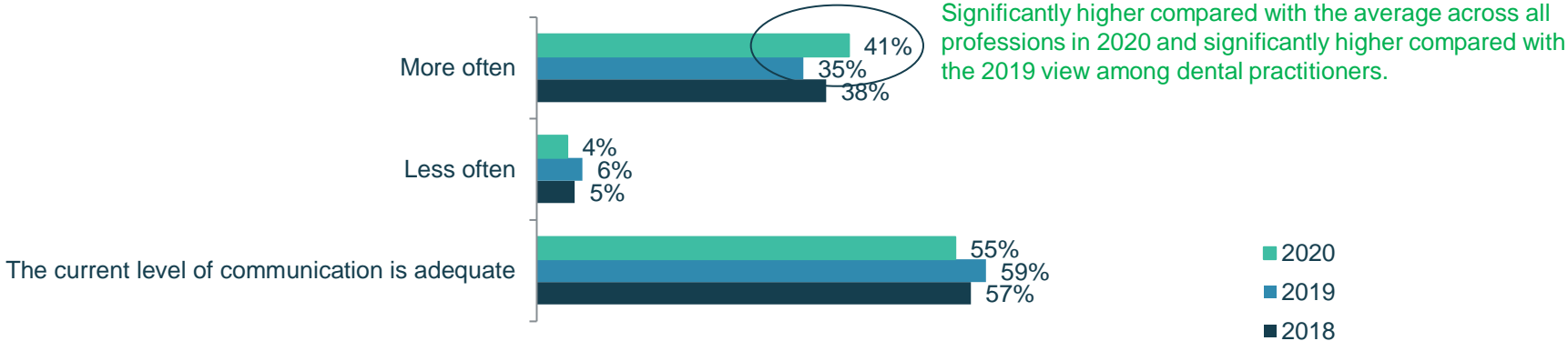
*Recognition that the infection control standards in dentistry were already high and that transmission of COVID 19 in dental practice was unlikely.*

*Providing a reduced cost to re-register this year because of the effects of COVID on business and the ability to earn an income caused by the Government shutting down our workplaces.*

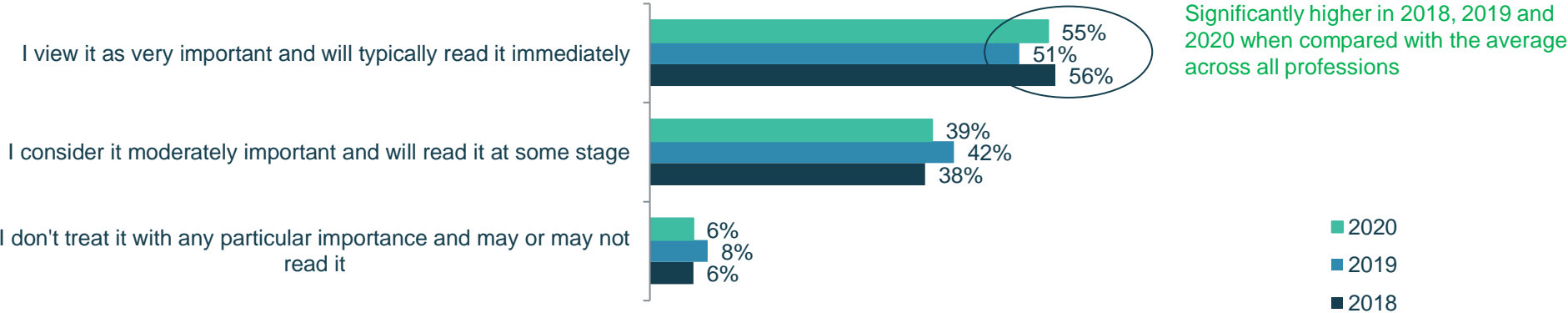
*Clear and quick responses re guidelines on practice - what is and isn't allowed. When to close. Guidance re additional PPE and environmental cleaning to maintain safety Clear statements on additional precautions needed to work safely Clear statements to the public re measures to curb outbreaks.*

# Response to communication by the Dental Board of Australia

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



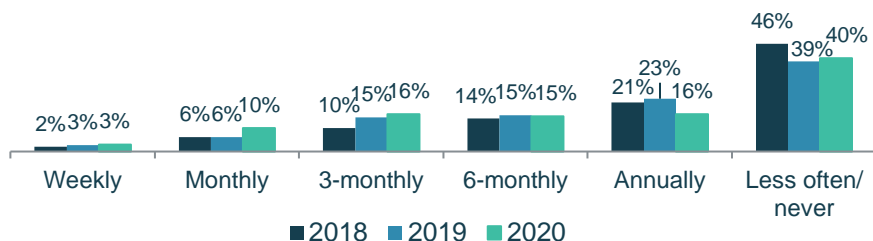
Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

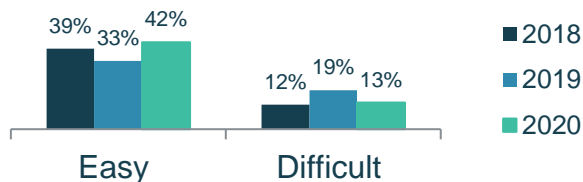
# Use of the Dental Board of Australia website

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



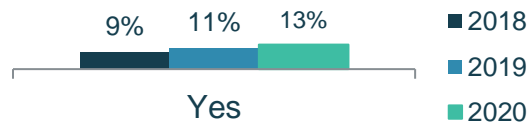
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this Board

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

2020: Reasons for visiting the National Board website



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

- Updates to standards.
- Regulations for dental hygienist.
- Guidelines for practising at certain restriction levels during the pandemic. Clarification during uncertain times.
- Past tribunal decisions.
- More details about the process of getting registered with an overseas qualification.

# Contact details

Truly Deeply  
18 Market St  
South Melbourne  
VIC 3205  
(03) 9693 0000

For further information please contact:

Michael Hughes  
Managing Partner  
[michael@trulydeeply.com.au](mailto:michael@trulydeeply.com.au)

Jane Briggs  
Research Director  
[jane@trulydeeply.com.au](mailto:jane@trulydeeply.com.au)

Truly Deeply