

Vodcast transcript

Starting your dental studies? What you need to know

March 2022

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Welcome to this presentation on what you need to know about being a student in an approved dental program of study, that is, a program that can lead to registration as a dental practitioner.

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If you are a dental student enrolled in an Australian program of study that qualifies you for registration in the dental profession, you already have student registration with the Dental Board of Australia.

This is a short presentation to explain your obligations as a registered dental student.

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As part of this we need to cover:

- who the Dental Board and Ahpra are
- what the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme is
- what we do, and
- what you need to know and do as a registered dental student, both now and before you complete your studies.

The Dental Board sits within what is known as the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme or the National Scheme for short. The Board works in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) to implement the scheme.

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Dental practitioners are just one of the 16 health professions regulated under the National Scheme which started in 2010.

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There are a number of advantages to the scheme which include:

- The setting of national standards of practice for every regulated health profession.
- The facilitation of workforce mobility so once registered, health practitioners can practise anywhere in Australia instead of needing to be registered in every state or territory where they work.
- Accreditation of training and education programs, such as the dental course you're involved in now.
- And, importantly, the online national register of practitioners which provides an up-to-date list of all health practitioners registered to practise in Australia.

Everyone visiting a health professional is encouraged to check the practitioner's registration on this public register because at the heart of the scheme is public safety.

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
National Boards
GPO Box 9958 Melbourne VIC 3001 Ahpra.gov.au 1300 419 495

Ahpra and the National Boards regulate these registered health professions: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice, Chinese medicine, chiropractic, dental, medical, medical radiation practice, midwifery, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathy, paramedicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology.

It is also worth noting that in the National Scheme, complaints about health practitioners are managed nationally by Ahpra, except in New South Wales and Queensland, where this is managed by the Health Professional Councils Authority and the 15 health professional councils, and the Office of the Ombudsman, respectively.

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Each health profession in the scheme is represented by a National Board.

While the primary role of the Boards is to protect the public, they are also responsible for registering practitioners and students, as well as other functions for their professions.

The Dental Board regulates dental practitioners in Australia and its functions include:

- registering students, dentists, dental specialists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, oral health therapists and dental prosthetists
- developing standards, codes and guidelines for the dental profession
- handling complaints against practitioners and students
- assessing overseas-trained practitioners who wish to practise in Australia, and
- approving accreditation standards and accredited courses of study.

Our functions are set out in the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory, which we call the 'National Law'.

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Here's a snapshot of the dental profession:

- The dental profession is made up of five divisions: dentists, oral health therapists, dental hygienists, dental prosthetists and dental therapists.
- There are just over 24,900 dental practitioners across Australia. This is up 2.4% from 2019/20.
- About 53% of all dental practitioners are females.
- The largest age group of dental practitioners are those aged 25-34.
- There are about 1,850 specialists nationally and over one third of these are orthodontists.
- 4.1% of practitioners had a complaint made about them in the 2020-2021 financial year.

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The dental profession consists of five divisions, each of which is its own registration category.

As of 30 June 2021, dentists make up nearly 75% of the profession.

Dental practitioners across all divisions of dentistry are responsible for the decisions, treatment and advice they provide and must only perform dental treatment:

- for which they have been educated and trained
- in which they are competent, and
- have been registered.

The dental team may include practitioners from across the divisions and a practitioner must refer a patient to another practitioner if the care required is outside of their scope of practice.

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If you're enrolled in what we call an 'approved program of study' you are registered as a student with the Dental Board. Your details were provided to the Board by your education provider after your enrolment and there are no fees for registration as a student.

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The Board can only take regulatory action involving a dental student in response to:

- impairment matters, where the impairment has a detrimental effect on clinical training, or
- when there is a conviction of a serious nature that might put public safety at risk.

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Anyone can make a complaint or raise a concern about a student regarding their health or a criminal matter.

Notifications may be received by Ahpra from:

- an education provider who is required under the National Law to report students whose health is impaired to such a degree that they may be a substantial risk of harm to the public or,
- a person or organisation who voluntarily reports a student for a health impairment or criminal matter or a contravention of an existing condition or undertaking that a student may have on their registration.

For example, if you injured yourself during your course of study which affected your ability to carry out training, your education provider or anyone, may raise a concern with us.

It is mandatory for education providers and practitioners to report student impairment, if the risk of harm to the public during clinical training is substantial. Therefore, the circumstances for making a mandatory report are very limited.

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Regulatory action by the Board on a student in response to health impairment or a criminal matter might involve:

- imposing conditions, or
- accepting an undertaking on your registration.

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It is important to note, that having an impairment doesn't mean you'll be reported to Ahpra.

Under the National Law, a student with an impairment is a person who has a physical or mental impairment, disability, condition or disorder, including substance abuse or dependence that detrimentally affects or is likely to detrimentally affect, the student's capacity to carry out clinical training.

You should only be reported if you or another person thinks you are placing the public at risk of substantial harm while carrying out your clinical training.

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If you do have an impairment that detrimentally affects your capacity to carry out clinical training, you will need to notify Ahpra and include the following information:

- a description of impairment, including its severity, and
- advice on how you manage this impairment, with a letter from your treating physician.

If you are unsure of any of the terms we use, please visit the Ahpra website to look at our glossary.

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We are all human; anyone of us could get sick or develop a significant mental or physical illness.

We need to look after ourselves as well as others. So, it's important to seek help and support when you need it and to support others in seeking help.

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Remember, your health matters. Dental Practitioner Support is a national health and wellbeing support service operating 24/7 for dental practitioners and students. Help is just a quick phone call away on 1800 377 700.

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All registered dental practitioners have legal and professional obligations which must be met annually in order to stay registered. When you complete your course of study and register as a dental practitioner you will need to meet these obligations.

These include meeting the English Language Skills Registration Standard and the Criminal History Registration Standard.

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You must meet the English language skills registration standard when you register as a dental practitioner which you must do at the end of your course.

Your education provider may have different English language requirements to that of the Board, so it's important that you understand if there are differences and how they may apply to you.

So please, prior to completing your course, make sure you read the standard carefully and understand how it might affect you when you complete your studies.

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As already mentioned in an earlier slide, you must notify Ahpra within seven days of becoming aware that:

- you have been charged with an offence punishable by 12 months imprisonment or more, or
- you have been convicted of, or are the subject of, a finding of guilt for an offence punishable by imprisonment, or
- your registration under the law of another country that provides for the registration of students has been suspended or cancelled.

Please read the Board's Criminal history registration standard carefully; it can easily be found on the Board's website.

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More information can be found on the Dental Board of Australia's website at: www.dentalboard.gov.au.

And on the Ahpra website at: www.ahpra.gov.au.

The Dental Board regularly publishes newsletters on its website so you can keep up to date with what's going on.

You may also want to follow Ahpra on social media on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

And if you have questions you can always call us on 1300 419 495.

We hope you found this presentation helpful.

Good luck with your studies and don't forget to watch our other videos in the months leading up to when you graduate.