

## Patient and consumer health and safety impact assessment: Professional competencies for psychologists

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August 2024

### Assessment purpose

The National Boards' Patient and Consumer Health and Safety Impact Statement (the statement) explains the potential impacts of a proposed registration standard, code or guideline on the health and safety of the public, vulnerable members of the community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.<sup>1</sup>

The four key components considered in the statement are:

1. The potential impact of the proposed Draft professional competencies for psychologists on the health and safety of patients and consumers particularly vulnerable members of the community including approaches to mitigate any potential negative or unintended effects.
2. The potential impact of the proposed Draft professional competencies for psychologists on the health and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples including approaches to mitigate any potential negative or unintended effects.
3. Engagement with patients and consumers, particularly vulnerable members of the community about the proposal.
4. Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about the proposal.

The National Boards' Patient and Consumer Health and Safety Impact Statement aligns with the National Scheme's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety strategy 2020–2025](#), the [National Scheme strategy 2020–25](#) and reflect key aspects of the revised consultation process in the [Procedures for developing registration standards, codes and guidelines and accreditation standards](#).

**Below is our assessment of the impact of the *Professional competencies for psychologists* on the health and safety of patients and consumers, particularly vulnerable members of the community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.**

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<sup>1</sup> This statement has been developed by Ahpra and the National Boards in accordance with section 25(c) and 35(c) of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). Section 25(c) requires Ahpra to establish procedures for ensuring that the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) operates in accordance with good regulatory practice. Section 35(c) assigns the National Boards functions to develop or approve standards, codes and guidelines for the health profession including the development of registration standards for approval by the Ministerial Council and that provide guidance to health practitioners registered in the profession. Section 40 of the National Law requires National Boards to ensure that there is wide-ranging consultation during the development of a registration standard, code, or guideline.

## Assessment

### 1. How will the *Professional competencies for psychology* impact patient and consumer health and safety, particularly vulnerable members of the community? What are the actions that have been taken to address or prevent this?

The Psychology Board of Australia (the Board) expects that improving the competencies for general registration will have a positive impact on client and consumer health and safety, particularly vulnerable members of the community.

The following changes to the general registration competencies are expected to benefit both the general public and priority groups within the community:

- Strengthening the competencies for general registration by improving the description of competency expectations for psychologists will ensure that the registration categories are being used effectively to promote a consistent level of training and safe practice.
- Introducing the term 'threshold professional competency' will more effectively describe the minimum professional competency necessary to practise safely and effectively as a registered psychologist in Australia.
- Updating the competencies required of the psychology workforce will ensure the competencies are contemporary, aligned with updated Australian accreditation standards and international best practice and aligned with changing public and consumer health needs.
- Listing all the competencies in one document will improve clarity, readability and usefulness of the competencies and as a result, improve stakeholder understanding of what knowledge and skills are expected of a registered psychologist.
- Amending and expanding the competencies on working with clients identifying with diverse social identity groups (updated Competency 7) will actively work towards providing positive health and mental health outcomes for priority groups within the community.
- Amending and expanding the competencies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety (updated Competency 8) using the agreed definition of cultural safety within the National Scheme will encourage the development of an increasingly sophisticated and culturally responsive psychology workforce and ensure that client safety for First Nations Peoples is the norm.

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* are based on best available evidence, best practice approaches for national and international regulation of psychologists and monitoring of the current competencies for general registration

In line with our [consultation processes](#), the Board undertook wide-ranging consultation using tailored approaches with peak community and consumer groups. Our engagement through consultation with vulnerable members of the community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples has assisted us to meet our responsibilities to protect client safety and health care quality. The Board has carefully considered consultation feedback to identify any unintended impacts (including potential negative impacts) of the updated general registration competencies. We have fully considered and taken actions to address any potential negative impacts for clients and consumers.

Submissions to our consultation and a consultation report is published on the Board's [past consultations](#) webpage.

## **2. How will the proposal impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples? What are the actions that have been taken to address or prevent this?**

The Board is committed to the National Scheme's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety strategy 2020–2025](#), which focuses on achieving client safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the norm.

The Board has carefully considered any potential impact of the *Professional competencies for psychologists* on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and how the impact compared to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples might be different.

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* make cultural safety a critical component of safe and effective healthcare. Culturally safe practice is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours, and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible, and responsive healthcare free of racism.

It is expected that the updated competencies will have a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client and consumer health and safety by encouraging culturally safe and respectful practice. The general registration competencies apply to all psychologists, and all psychologists have a role in ensuring client safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia's health system.

As part of the consultation process, we have undertaken wide-ranging consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology peak bodies to seek advice about the development of culturally safe competencies for psychology practice and to understand any impacts of updating the competencies. We will continue to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and stakeholders to promote a smooth and culturally safe implementation of the *Professional competencies for psychologists*, and to help us identify any other future impacts.

## **3. How will the impact of the *Professional competencies for psychology* be actively monitored and evaluated?**

Part of the Board's work in keeping the public safe is ensuring that all standards, codes and guidelines are regularly reviewed. In keeping with this, we will monitor and regularly review the *Professional competencies for psychologists* to check they are working as intended.