

Quick reference guide: Acceptable levels of evidence in advertising for Chinese medicine practitioners

Overview

The *Quick reference guide: Acceptable levels of evidence in advertising for Chinese medicine practitioners* (the quick reference guide) has been developed to provide clear advice to both practitioners and the public. Advertisers must ensure that any statements and claims made about Chinese medicine practice are not false, misleading, deceptive or create an unreasonable expectation of benefits from such services. Any therapeutic claims that are made in advertising must be substantiated by acceptable evidence.

This quick reference guide should be used together with the [Check your advertising: Chinese medicine examples](#). You should be familiar with both documents when assessing whether your advertising is compliant with the [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law](#) (the National Law), along with other resources on our website including the [Guidelines for advertising a regulated health service](#) (the Guidelines).

Advertising regulated health services

The National Law's advertising requirements apply to any forms of advertising of a regulated health service to the public, such as Chinese medicine. This includes advertising electronically on a website, radio or social media, or in printed media through a local newspaper or waiting rooms such as pamphlets.

To avoid misleading the public, claims made in advertising about regulated health services must be supported by acceptable evidence. Ahpra and National Boards' approach to assessing evidence to support claims is consistent with the wider scientific and academic community. All registered health practitioners are required to ensure that their advertising is compliant with their obligations under the National Law and the [Ahpra shared Code of Conduct](#).

Evidence needed for advertising vs evidence used in clinical decision-making

There is an important difference between the evidence needed for therapeutic claims in advertising and the evidence that can be used in clinical decision-making. A higher standard of evidence is required to support claims made in advertising. This is because in advertising, a statement may be easily misinterpreted or taken out of context and become misleading. Evidence given in clinical decision-making, such as in consultation with a patient or client, is less likely to be misinterpreted.

When treating patients, you must obtain informed consent for the care provided and are expected to discuss the evidence for different treatment options (see below). In advertising, the claims are generic, and you are not available to clarify whether a treatment is appropriate for an individual patient.

The overall impression created by the advertising is what will be considered and it is possible for statements to be misleading or deceptive in certain contexts.

Experience-based Chinese medicine evidence

Chinese medicine has a long history of experience-based practice and has rich classical literature. Unless a claim is also backed up by scientific and/or academic study, the experience-based Chinese medicine cannot be relied upon as the sole piece of evidence to support a claim in advertising.

Experience-based Chinese medicine evidence can be used in clinical decision-making as an addition to evidence-based practice, as stated in the [Professional capabilities for Chinese medicine practitioners](#). You must obtain informed consent for the care provided and are expected to discuss the evidence for different treatment options and whether they are appropriate with your patients/clients.

What is considered acceptable evidence in advertising?

You must be able to substantiate claims made in your advertising. This is referred to as 'acceptable evidence' in the Guidelines. Ahpra and the Board assess the evidence for claims made in advertising consistent with approaches used by the wider scientific and academic community. Primary sources of evidence, that are publicly available and in English, should be used.

Evidence is assessed as acceptable where a body of evidence rates highly against the following six factors:

1. Source – Is your evidence from a publicly accessible and reliable source? Peer-review is a method used to screen the quality and reliability of research evidence. If your evidence is not peer-reviewed, it is unlikely that you have acceptable evidence to support your claim.
2. Relevance – Is the research question clearly stated and directly applicable to the patient population targeted by your advertising claim?
3. Inclusion – Have you considered the relevant evidence equally? If there are studies that contradict your claim, you need to acknowledge and carefully consider these before you can make your claim. If many well-conducted and independent studies support your claim, you can be more confident in the evidence.
4. Level – Was the study design a high enough level to support your advertising claim? Higher-level study designs use methods that reduce the risk of bias, chance and confounding factors from influencing the results. By using high-level evidence, you can have more confidence in the results of the study.
5. Quality – Did your evidence use appropriate research methods? For example, a randomised controlled trial, while considered a high-level study design, would be considered as unacceptable evidence if it used a very small sample size (e.g. 10 participants).
6. Strength – Does your evidence show a meaningful effect that supports your advertising claim? The research that you use as evidence should have statistical outcomes and clinical significance that is relevant to your claim. This is to ensure the study findings are meaningful in a real-world setting.

Further explanations on how to assess advertising against each of the above factors can be found in the [Ahpra advertising hub](#).

To make treatment claims in your advertising you should ensure that there is acceptable evidence to support each and every claim. If there is no acceptable evidence the claims and any associated articles and/or research supporting the claims should be removed from the advertisement.

You should check your advertising to make sure it complies with the National Law, including any treatment claims that are made to ensure they are supported by acceptable evidence. Further detail about [acceptable evidence in advertising](#) can be found on the Ahpra website.

Further information

[Guidelines for advertising a regulated health service](#)

[Check your advertising: Chinese medicine examples](#)

[Factors for assessing if evidence is acceptable](#)

[Professional capabilities for Chinese medicine practitioners](#)

[Shared Code of conduct](#)