

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Wednesday 21 April 2021. The meeting was chaired by Nello Marino from the Australian Podiatry Association.

The Professions Reference Group discussed the following:

- Ahpra and National Boards have extended the pandemic sub-register for medical practitioners, nurses, midwives, pharmacists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners for up to 12 months (to 5 April 2022 with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners extending at a later date). This is to help with the COVID-19 vaccination program at the request of the Commonwealth Health Minister.
- The Senate Community Affairs References Committee recently announced a new inquiry of the work of Ahpra and the National Scheme. The terms of reference are far reaching and Ahpra will provide a submission to the Senate Inquiry by 30 April 2021, with reporting expected in November 2021.
- Ahpra is working with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care and state and territory health complaints entities to improve the national system for management of complaints, including at the local level.
- Ahpra launched its *Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2021-2023* which builds on its first *Reflect RAP*. The RAP sits alongside other work to improve cultural safety and eliminate racism in the health system including Ahpra's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy 2020-2025* and increasing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on boards and committees.
- Ahpra and National Boards welcomed a Health Council policy direction on the recommendations of *the Independent Review of Accreditation Systems Final Report*. It states Ahpra's Agency Management Committee must establish a new, independently chaired committee to consider key accreditation system issues and have broad stakeholder membership to give independent expert advice. A first meeting of the new committee is planned for July 2021 if the membership is finalised.
- South Australia State Manager, Sheryle Pike who has been with Ahpra since the beginning of the National Scheme has announced her retirement and Ahpra is actively recruiting for the position.
- The graduate application period is now complete with over 31,500 applications received, an 8.6 per cent increase from the previous year. A review is now underway to identify improvements from this year's successful campaign.
- There are about 1,400 open registration applications from internationally qualified practitioners, mainly from medical practitioners and nurses, who have in-principle approval but cannot complete their registration until they are in Australia and meet proof of identity requirements. These will remain open until 30 June 2021 and Ahpra is consulting with National Boards about their ongoing management.
- Specialist Medicare rebates will cease for general practitioners without specialist registration on 16 June 2021. Ahpra is working with the Commonwealth Health Department to contact 3,000+ general practitioners who need to apply for specialist registration to ensure their continuing access to these rebates.
- Operation Reset is now complete. The project saw significant engagement, staff and delegate training and accelerated application of the *Risk assessment and control framework* to all aspects of notifications. The focus is now on embedding the use of the framework.
- The *English language registration standard* review is now in preliminary consultation. The standard is common across all National Boards (with the exception of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board). Proposed changes are minor and include simplifying language to make it easier for practitioners to understand and for Ahpra staff to apply.

- Preliminary consultation on the *Code of conduct*, shared by 12 of the 15 National Boards, is complete. This included user testing with practitioners which provided helpful revisions. The Code now includes more information on bullying and harassment and will commence public consultation in May 2021.
- Ahpra is conducting user testing on templates (a draft *Supervised practice plan* and *Supervised practice report*) which are part of the proposed *Supervised practice framework* and invited members to nominate practitioner participants.
- Ahpra sought feedback on the draft *Supporting professional practice strategy*, which aims to support practitioners to practise professionally. Proposed projects include a hub on the Ahpra website. Members were asked to provide feedback on what resources or information would be useful for practitioners and how to engage in this work as it progresses.
- Ahpra updated members and sought feedback on progress to enhance the search functionality of the public register published on the Ahpra website, including security measures to address screen scraping activity.
- A National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) requirement for registered nurses and midwives working in aged care and caring for patients with disability in Victoria to undergo NDIS worker screening was raised as potentially duplicative and creating an additional regulatory burden for regulated health professions. The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission states that registered health practitioners do not need to go through this process, however, they may be asked by an employer to do it.
- Ahpra noted its work on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission to formalise an understanding of mutual roles and responsibilities and that this is still ongoing.
- The next scheduled meeting is on Wednesday 9 June 2021.

Nello Marino

Chair
Professions Reference Group