

Transcript – *Ready to Work: Your obligations as a registered optometrist* webinar for new graduates

7 September 2022

Lynda Pham: Hi. Welcome to the Ready to Work webinar. My name is Lynda and I'm the Executive Officer supporting the Optometry Board of Australia. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and that, for me, this webinar is being held on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I would like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Before I introduce the Board Chair, I would like to run through some housekeeping for the webinar tonight. You'll see that your microphones are muted, so we won't hear your voices, and the chat function is off. If you would like to ask a question, please do type it in the Q&A box at the bottom of the screen and we will answer as many of your questions as we can during the breaks scheduled throughout the presentation. Please note that this is a live national webinar and it will be recorded. You won't be able to see anyone else's questions so please, actually ask general questions as we can't discuss anyone's personal situation or private information. But if you do have a personal question, we'll ask you to contact the Ahpra customer service team directly. If we don't get through everyone's questions tonight, we will publish a Q&A sheet on the Board's website.

So with great pleasure, I'd like to introduce Judy Hannan, the Chair of the Optometry Board of Australia. Judy has had an extensive career in optometry across private practice, corporate and industry. She is the first female Optometry Board Chair since the start of the National Scheme. She has been the Board Chair since 2021 and a practitioner Board member since 2018. She is currently on Wollondilly Council in rural New South Wales and is also a member of Optometry Council. I'll now hand over to Judy who will present tonight's webinar.

Ms Hannan: Thanks, Lynda, and welcome, everyone. In tonight's presentation, we're going to cover a range of topics. We're going to talk about the role of Ahpra and the Board, your professional obligations, including the Code of conduct for optometrists, the registration standards you must comply with, the guidelines that will apply to you, information on notifications, and we will touch briefly on getting registered for the first time. And hopefully you've already watched the video on new graduate registrations. And between the sections we're going to stop to answer questions. We have some questions that you sent in when you registered and some common questions that we've been asked in the past, but please feel free to put any other questions into the Q&A box as they come to mind. Ahpra works in partnership with 15 national boards to ensure the community has access to a safe health workforce across all professions registered under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. Ahpra supports the work of the boards and Ahpra will be your first point of contact when you apply for registration.

So what exactly is regulation? Regulation is an action by government to limit risk to the public. You see regulation in all sorts of professions, not just health, for example law and teaching. The Board regulates the optometry profession. We work with Ahpra to ensure that any risk to the public is managed by ensuring that only qualified optometrists are registered and registered optometrists meet ongoing requirements such as appropriate practice, CPD, criminal history, and professional indemnity insurance. This image shows you

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.

what the National Scheme does. There are more than 800,000 registered health practitioners and about 6,500 of these are optometrists. When we talk about the National Scheme, we mean Ahpra, the National Boards and the accreditation authorities. Together we protect the public by setting national standards in educational practice and registration standards, auditing compliance to standards, managing notifications about health practitioners, publishing the online register, accrediting your education programs and facilitating a mobile health workforce. You are now no longer required to register in each State and Territory of Australia. Here you can see who does what in the National Scheme. We have the Optometry Board of Australia and we make decisions on things like registration standards, codes, guidelines and policies. We handle registration and notifications and approve accreditation standards and programs of study. Ahpra administers the National Scheme. It supports the 15 boards with administration. Ahpra is your point of contact with the Board and it can refer notifications to other entities. There are co-regulatory arrangements in place in New South Wales and Queensland, so if you happen to get a notification in one of these states, it may be investigated and heard by a different authority. In New South Wales, the Health Professional Council Authority and the Health Care Complaints Commission manage notifications. And in Queensland, the Office of Health Ombudsman manages notifications.

So those were the National Scheme organisation. But this slide shows some of the main organisations in the optometry profession. There is the Board who, as I've said, is concerned with protecting the public. Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand, OCANZ, is assigned the accreditation functions by the Board and is concerned with educational standards for optometrists. And Optometry Australia, OA, is our professional association. They represent the profession and provide services to optometrists. Like any other organisation, the Board has a mission and a vision. Our mission is to ensure safe and professional optometrists for Australia and our vision is for our communities to have trust and confidence in regulated optometrists. This slide shows you who we are. As you can see, the Board is made up of a mix of members. Our members are both optometrists and community members, and we're located across the country. You can find out more information about the Board members on our website. Let's have a look at a snapshot of optometrists. This slide shows some data about the profession as of the 30th of June, 2022. The majority of us hold scheduled medicine endorsement. We have a few more female optometrists than males. And the largest cohort in the profession are between the ages of 25 to 29.

Now I'm going to talk about your professional obligations. Let's start with the Code of conduct. This is a revised and more detailed code and it just came into effect a few months ago and I'd encourage you all to go and read it and have a good idea of the conduct expected of an optometrist. The Code outlines what both the Board and the public expect from you, including professional behaviour; ways of working with patients and other practitioners within the health care system; safe, effective and collaborative practice; respectful and culturally safe practice; ethics, confidentiality and privacy. In addition to the revised Code of conduct, we've published a suite of resources, both for health practitioners like yourselves, and your clients. There are the principles of the Code and frequently asked questions, but I think a really helpful resource is the case studies for practitioners and patients. They give some concrete examples of how you could apply the Code in everyday situations, addressing areas such as bullying and harassment. I've talked a little bit about registration standards, but what exactly are they? Registration standards we publish set out the qualifications and requirements that you need to meet to be registered. Some you need to meet before you get registered for the first time, for example, English language skills. Some you need to meet each year before you renew your registration, for example, CPD. And some you will need to meet at those points, for example, criminal history.

So let's start with the CPD registration standard. This is the one you'll need to start thinking about straightaway because you will need to plan to meet at your next registration next year. It's really important that you understand the requirements well, as you'll need to meet it every single year you practise as an optometrist, and it takes planning and activity each year. Every year, you'll need to complete 20 hours of general education, plus 10 hours of scheduled medicine CPD each year. CPD must help to improve your competence, and it must include at least five hours of interactive CPD. CPR must be renewed once every three years. And, most importantly, you need to keep a portfolio of learning goals, planned activities and your reflections on these activities. As you can see, you'll need to plan for your CPD, so you should start early. Each year when you renew your registration, you will declare whether or not you have met the Board's

requirements for CPD. The requirements are the same whether you're working full-time or part-time. You'll need to keep records and you may need to submit these to the Board if you are audited. You can find a suite of resources on our website to help you, including further guidance and templates. Your professional association also has resources to help meet the requirements. Here we have an example of what an optometrist might do to fulfil these requirements. You can see what she did here on the slide, so I'm just going to make some comments on some of the points. You'll see that CPD doesn't have to be formal. It can be meetings with mentors or colleagues, or reading journals, provided these activities contribute to your improving your practice. Cultural safety training can be counted towards your hours, and we would encourage you to undertake it to help you meet your obligations under the code of conduct for First Nations peoples. You'll also need to have a minimum of five hours of CPD in an interactive setting with other practitioners. Marnie here met this through her meetings with her mentor, her cultural safety training and her pre-conference workshop she attended.

The Board's criminal history registration standard will apply to you throughout your career. The standard – that means that you have to inform the Board within seven days if you are charged with an offence punishable by 12 months imprisonment or more, or convicted or found guilty of an offence punishable by imprisonment in Australia and/or overseas. Having a criminal history doesn't automatically disqualify you from practice. The standard describes how the Board will consider and make a decision on your declaration. At registration renewal you must disclose any changes to your criminal history. Here's some examples of what you need to tell Ahpra but if in doubt, please notify Ahpra. We can tell you if something isn't relevant to your registration. Ahpra audits criminal history and if you fail to tell Ahpra any relevant information, there can be repercussions for your registration.

The next one I'll talk about is the recency of practice standard. The standard doesn't apply to you at your first registration if you register within 24 months of graduating from your program of study, so we recommend that you do register within that two-year window. Once you've registered, you must complete a minimum of 450 hours of practice within your regular scope of practice over the past three years. That's 450 hours of practice, and it's about 60 days. Each year when you renew your registration, you'll need to declare if you've met the recency of practice requirements. If you haven't met the requirements, then the Board will consider your particular case and what you will need to do to renew your registration. So what exactly is practice? For the Board, practice means any role, whether paid or not, in which the person uses their skills and knowledge as a health practitioner in their profession. Practice in this context is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes things like using professional knowledge while working in a direct, non-clinical relationship with clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles and any other roles that impacts on the safe, effective delivery of services in the profession. Changing your scope can be narrowing, for example going from clinical care to management, or extending, say going from a teaching role to clinical care. You must inform the Board if you are extending your scope of practice and provide a professional development plan to support this extension. So here's an example of a work pattern that met the recency of practice registration standard. As you can see, your minimum 450 hours don't need to be consecutive but you do need to meet the standard each three-year period. The majority of Justine's optometry practice was in the first year of the cycle. At her next renewal, she won't be counting that year, so she'll have to do more optometry practice to be able to meet the standard. So be aware, if you stop practising for a period of time and the majority of your hours are made up in the oldest year of the three-year period, you'll need to be very careful that you continue to meet the requirement in the coming years.

So the next standard we'll talk about is the professional indemnity insurance standard. As a health practitioner, you will need to hold appropriate professional indemnity insurance to meet this standard and at each registration renewal you must declare if you've met those requirements. If you don't have indemnity insurance, you can't practise.

Let's move on to the English language standard. To successfully apply for your registration, you must demonstrate that you have a good level of English language. The standard shows how you can do this. It may be that your education meets certain requirements or through a language test. This standard applies

to initial applications only and once you've demonstrated that you've met it, you won't be asked about it again at your renewal.

Audits of random samples of optometrists occur each year. If selected for an audit, you will receive an audit notice from Ahpra. You will need to provide supporting documentation to demonstrate that you've met the standard being audited. And any of the four standards can be audited. That's criminal history, CPD, recency of practice or professional indemnity insurance. So we've allocated some time here to answer any questions. Do we have any questions on the Q&A, Lynda?

Lynda: We have a couple of questions. Firstly, there's a question about if the webinar can be viewed later on.

Ms Hannan: This webinar is being recorded and you'll be able to go back and have a look at it at any time.

Lynda: Lovely. We've got a question about what happens if we don't do the 450 hours over the three years of registration? Do I lose my registration?

Ms Hannan: So that depends on how long it has been since you last practised. The Board actually looks at ways that you can safely work and it might require some supervised practice or further education. We have a look at your individual case and circumstances.

Lynda: Okay, and when do I actually need to start my CPD?

Ms Hannan: So, CPD is about lifelong learning and it's really good to get into the habit of planning and completing your CPD. You'll need to demonstrate that you've met the standard at your first renewal, so don't leave it till the last minute. Plan ahead.

Lynda: Lovely. We also have a question about what is PII?

Ms Hannan: Professional indemnity insurance. And if you want to know about that you probably should talk to your professional association and they will be able to guide you in that direction.

Lynda: And we have a question about can we ask someone to handwrite their certification electronically on the document?

Ms Hannan: You surely can. We're going to come to that in a little while. It can be handwritten but there are very specific words and we're going to talk about that in the next section or two.

Lynda: Great. In the interests of time, if there's any more questions about these sections we will be publishing it in a Q&A in a couple of weeks.

Ms Hannan: That's really good.

Lynda: Thanks, Judy.

Ms Hannan: Great to hear some good questions there. So let's continue on. So the Board publishes guidelines to help optometrists meet the standards. The first guideline I'll talk about is the guideline for the use of scheduled medicine. This guideline supports the endorsement for scheduled medicine registration. However, we'll concentrate on the guidelines because you will all automatically meet the standard by just completing your program. This guideline gives you additional information on medicines, including the quality use of medicines, antimicrobial resistance, collaborative care, chronic glaucoma and emergency management of acute primary angle closure, and a list of topical medications for endorsed optometrists.

What to consider when advertising your services as an optometrist. Health claims in advertising rather than information provided in a patient consultation may be easily misinterpreted or taken out of context and therefore become misleading. Claims in advertising must be supported by acceptable evidence and this is a higher level of evidence than the evidence to support clinical decision-making. We actually publish guidelines on advertising a regulated health service. If you're advertising your optometry service your

advertising must not be false, misleading or deceptive; offer a gift, discount or other inducements unless the terms and conditions of the offer are also stated; it mustn't use testimonials about the service or business; it must not create an unreasonable expectation of beneficial treatment or directly or indirectly encourage the indiscriminate or unnecessary use of regulated health services. The guidelines and other resources can help you to understand what is required if you are advertising. Ahpra's website has a resource centre for advertising, including the guidelines, practitioner tools and examples to help apply the requirements to your advertising, information for the public and frequently asked questions. I guess some advertising words to be wary of include things like "cure", "can help/improve/ treat" or "effectively treats", "safe" and "effective".

Another very important set of obligations – as a registered optometrist you'll need to be familiar with the guidelines for mandatory notifications. To protect the public from the risk of harm, health practitioners and their employers must make mandatory notifications in some limited circumstances. This is a legal requirement under the National Law. There are separate guidelines applicable to registered health practitioners and registered students. As you will be transitioning to registered optometrists soon, I'm going to focus on the guidelines applicable to the registered health practitioners. Both health practitioners and students can be reported and health practitioners, employers and education providers have an obligation to report. So what must be reported? There are four concerns that may trigger a mandatory notification, depending on the risk of harm to the public. There might be impairment, intoxication while practising, significant departure from accepted professional standards and sexual misconduct. If you have any concerns about another health practitioner, you should consult the guidelines. They explain the circumstances that do and don't trigger a mandatory notification and the different levels of risk you need to think about. The Board has a range of other guidelines, position statements, frameworks and guidance documents and we don't have time to go through everything we publish tonight, but for more information, you can find these documents on our website. So, Lynda, do we have any more questions?

Lynda: We don't have any questions on this section, but we did have a couple more questions come through from the previous section. So the question is, "Do we need to demonstrate that we have PII, so that's the insurance, or is being a member of Optometry Australia enough since they provide all members with PII?"

Ms Hannan: So, usually, Optometry Australia, as a part of their membership fee, includes PII but I suggest that you are very careful when you look at your membership and check that it does. When you sign for your registration, you will sign a declaration to state that you do have it.

Lynda: Lovely. And we have a question about English language. So the question is, "For international students, do we need to pass a certain test or as long as we finish our five-year study is that okay?"

Ms Hannan: So depending on where the international students have done their course, usually if they've done their course in Australia they'll probably get through the requirements. But what I suggest you do is to have a look at the guidelines on that of the standards and if you don't meet them by your education, there is some courses that are recommended.

Lynda: Great, that's it. Thanks.

Ms Hannan: That's all? Okay. Just going along, we're going to talk about notifications. So anyone can make a complaint about a registered health practitioner and these are called voluntary notifications. Voluntary notifications can be about a health or impairment, where persons may have a physical or a mental impairment, disability condition or disorder, including substance abuse or dependence that detrimentally affects or is likely to detrimentally affect the practice of optometry. It can be about conduct, which is the professional conduct of a registered health practitioner, if it may be of a lesser standard than might reasonably be expected by the public or professional peers. It could be an advertising breach of the National Law, and it can be about the wrongful use of the protected title. In our profession, the protected title is 'optometrist' and the law also protects the title 'optician'. This data shows you the number of notifications that Ahpra received in 2020-21. There are over 10,000 notifications, about all health practitioners, and 44 are about optometrists. That's less than 1% of optometrists. And while ours is not a high notification profession, it is likely that some of you may and probably will get a notification made about you sometime during your career.

So who makes notifications? All sorts of people can. Most will be patients and their carers but also other practitioners, employers and other people. The Board can also initiate a notification about a health practitioner. This slide shows the possible outcomes of a notification. The green slice of this pie chart shows that the Board decided not to take any further action and that is what happens in the majority of cases. Less than 1% of practitioners end up with a registration surrendered, suspended or cancelled. A few get a caution and some have conditions imposed on their registration. For example, that might be further education and/or some supervision. Some practitioners accept an undertaking and about 15% were referred to other organisations. For example, these might have been located in New South Wales or Queensland where our co-regulators take care of those notifications. So what do you do if you get a notification made against you? Firstly, you should talk to the assigned case officer. You can contact the case officer at any time. It's important you understand the process and have an estimate of the timelines and know what is expected of you. You should contact your indemnity insurer. They have experience managing notifications and can provide valuable independent advice and support. You should also seek some support. We know having a notification made against you can be a stressful event. You can seek support from your general practitioner or psychologist or other mental health support. Your employer, if you work at a health service, might have an employee assistance program or another service. And many practitioners say that telling a few trusted colleagues can also be very helpful. Receiving a notification is not something to be ashamed of. It happens to many practitioners over the course of their career. I also like to remind people that having a notification can be a learning event. For example, if the basis of a – well, of a lot of notifications is communication between practitioner and patient, so a notification in this area may help you focus on improving this aspect of your practice. So, Lynda, any more questions?

Lynda: We don't actually have any questions about this section, but what I might do is bring up a common question that we've had in the past. "So how will I know if someone has made a notification about me?"

Ms Hannan: So if somebody makes a notification about you, Ahpra will contact you regarding that notification and you'll be asked some questions and it'll be about whether or not you've been practising appropriately and safely. The Board will take action to protect the public if it finds your behaviour is placing the public at risk or if your practice has been unsafe.

Lynda: Great, thanks, Judy.

Ms Hannan: Okay, so let's spend the last part of our session talking about registration to practise as an optometrist. So why do I need to be registered? The National Law requires you to be registered if you use the title optometrist. As I talked about earlier, practising as an optometrist is not limited to providing direct clinical services to clients. Typically, the Board will require you to be registered if you hold qualifications as an optometrist and if you're using your skills and knowledge as an optometrist, regardless of whether or not you are directly treating people. Additional guidance on this is available on the Board's website. If you have successfully completed a Board-approved program of study, you are deemed suitably qualified and competent to practise; but successful completion of approved qualifications is not registration, so you need to go through the registration process prior to commencing practice in the profession. So your main question right now that you're thinking about is probably how do I apply for registration? To apply for registration you'll need to create an online account using the online service portal on the Ahpra website and complete your application. You'll need to upload your required documents and pay registration and application fees. National Boards and Ahpra recognise that the COVID pandemic has affected people in several ways, including financial hardship, and if you're experiencing financial hardship and unable to pay the required fee, you should contact Ahpra's customer service team to discuss your situation before you complete your online graduate application. You'll need to check you've provided everything, including certified copies of your proof of identity, and wait for Ahpra to receive your results from your education provider. Once your education provider confirms that you have successfully completed your course, Ahpra will finalise your registration and send you an email confirming that you are registered. Your name will be published on the register of practitioners and once your name appears on that national register you can begin to work as an optometrist. In October, you'll get an email from Ahpra inviting you to apply for registration. However, you don't have to wait for that email. The online registration process is open now so you can apply 12 weeks before you're due to complete your studies. We aim to finalise your application within two weeks of receiving

your results from your education provider but you don't need to wait until your university sends us your results. Sometimes we may need to ask for more details, which might take you time to obtain and submit to Ahpra.

Some of the most common problems we see: names that don't exactly match in all your documentation. This can take some time for you to rectify. Incorrectly certified documents. It is important that you get your photographic proof of identity documents certified correctly, and there's examples of the correct certification on our website. So be sure to show this to the person certifying your document as there are very specific requirements. If the certifications aren't correct, it will take more time for us to finalise your application. We can't apply for your criminal history check until we have the right ID so this will delay your application. Certified documents are valid up to the date of the expiry of the document which has been certified. Some of the other common problems are missing documents. Late applications – a particular problem if you have a start-work date. Remember, it isn't just optometrists applying for registration at this time of year, it's all of the professions, so get in the queue early. Incomplete English language requirements. If you aren't certain about how you can meet the registration standard, make sure you contact Ahpra to discuss your best pathway.

So most importantly, when can you start working? You can start practising optometry once your name appears on the public register of practitioners. You'll receive an email update when your application is completed, which will advise you of your registration number and provide your self-service login details. So once you've registered, it's not finished. Your ongoing responsibilities are to renew your registration annually each year. If you're late with this, you'll need to pay a late fee. Declare any change of contact details, principal place of practice, criminal proceedings, health issues likely to impact on your practice. And you'll need to comply with the registration standards I've talked about tonight and the Code of conduct. So do we have any other questions?

Lynda: They're coming through slowly. "So what is a case officer, Judy?"

Ms Hannan: So a case officer is somebody that works for Ahpra and they will take your messages and they will look after you if you've had a notification.

Lynda: Great. Another question. "With the primary English pathway, do we need to provide any documents regarding our English skill level?"

Ms Hannan: When the primary pathway you asked about provides details on the application form, in some cases you need to provide additional information and there's details on that application form that you can chat with a person at Ahpra to get the information. If you've completed one of the optometry practice standards education facilities in Australia, you'll probably pass that without the requirement of an extra test. But if you haven't, then they'll be able to give you some information about the English language tests that you can take.

Lynda: Great. We have another question. "So what happens if I move address while my application is being processed?"

Ms Hannan: You'll need to update it with Ahpra, either online or on the phone. You just need to contact them and let them know.

Lynda: Great, thanks, Judy.

Ms Hannan: All right. So once you've registered you may like to start thinking about whether you'd like to nominate to become a Board member during your career. The Health ministers appoint Board members and from time to time you'll see a call for expression of interest on the Board's website or in our newsletters. Now I think I've missed the impairment thing. No. Yep, a great deal of information can be found on the Board's website and on the Ahpra website. We'll also regularly publish newsletters on our website so you can keep up to date on what's going on. You might also want to follow Ahpra on social media on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn and if you have questions, you can always contact Ahpra directly. So I'd like to wish you

all good luck with your studies. Thank you for your time today and I'll probably bump into you around the optometry world.

Lynda: Great. Thank you, Judy. Thank you, everyone, for attending. Just to wrap up, just a reminder that the recording of this webinar and a Q&A document will be published on the Board's website in a couple of weeks so if we didn't get to your questions today, it will be in the document. Now before you log out, you'll notice a short survey. We'll appreciate your feedback on today's webinar. So more information is always available on your Board's website. Feel free to contact Ahpra if you do have any other questions. Thanks again and farewell.

END OF RECORDING: (39:49)