

Communiqué: Chinese Medicine Reference Group meeting 2024

Purpose

On 17 September 2024, the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (the Board) hosted its seventh annual Reference Group Meeting. This year's theme was **Building Trust: Strengthening Confidence through Informed Understanding**.

As with previous years, the 2024 Reference Group provided an opportunity for the Board to bring a range of stakeholders together to share information and discuss challenges and opportunities for the regulation of Chinese medicine practitioners and students and the profession more broadly.

Overview

This year, Ahpra and the Board welcomed 18 attendees, including community consumer representatives, representatives from the major Chinese medicine professional associations, education providers, individual practitioners, insurance company representatives, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The Board expresses gratitude to Uncle Allan Murray, Chairperson of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, for opening the day with a Welcome to Country.



Reference Group attendees actively engaged in discussions across theme topics, being the challenges of regulation, Board and National Scheme Priorities, presentation from the TGA, engaging with diverse communities, building trust and confidence in regulation, and outcomes-focused accreditation – standard and quality of practice.

The Board gives special thanks to our presenters and facilitators of these topics:

- Mr Martin Fletcher, Ahpra CEO (the challenges in regulation)
- The Board's Chair, Adjunct Professor Danforn Lim (Board and National Scheme priorities)
- Mr Avinash Clarke, Assistant Secretary of the Complementary and Over the Counter Medicine Branch at the Therapeutic Goods Administration (presentation from the TGA)
- Ms Carol Nader, Ahpra NSW State Manager (Engaging with diverse communities)
- Ms Susan Biggar, National Manager of Regulatory Experience and Engagement (building trust and confidence in regulation)
- Ms Monica Lambley, Operations Manager, Notifications (building trust and confidence in regulation)
- Mr Michael Carpenter, Specialist Accreditation Advisor (outcomes-focused accreditation – standard and quality of practice)
- Mr Ian Walker, Manager, Program Accreditation (outcomes-focused accreditation – standard and quality of practice)

At conference close, the Board received positive feedback from attendees who advised that the day was informative and fostered productive discussions about future priorities of the National Scheme and regulation of the profession.

Agenda

The agenda, presentation topics and discussions had on the day are briefly outlined below.

1. Conference open

All members were welcomed to the meeting.

2.1 General welcome

Ms Kirsten Hibberd, the Board's Executive Officer, acknowledged attendees and provided a brief welcome to the day before introducing Uncle Allan Murray to do a Welcome to Country.

1.2 Welcome to Country

Uncle Allan Murray, Chairperson from the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council provided a Welcome to Country.

1.4 Introduction to the Board and staff

The Chair, Adjunct Professor Danforn Lim briefly introduced [Board members](#) and Ahpra staff who support the work of the Board.

1.5 Overview of purpose of Reference Group

The Chair outlined the importance of the annual Reference Group and outlined the topics for this year's theme 'Building Trust: Strengthening Confidence through Informed Understanding'. A group photo of attendees was also taken.

2. The Challenges of regulation: Mr Martin Fletcher

Mr Fletcher sent his apologies for being unable to join the Reference Group meeting in person and provided a recorded presentation. The presentation acknowledged the growth of the National Scheme since 2009 and the challenges faced in regulation both now and into the future.

3. Board and National Scheme priorities: Update from the Chair

The Chair provided an overview of Ahpra and the Board's role within the National Scheme, highlighting that the primary focus of the Scheme is to protect the public.

The presentation included an update on the Board's and National Scheme's recent priorities, as summarised below:

- The Board's information campaigns:
 - Informing the public on what to expect from Chinese medicine practitioner and Acupuncturists through online videos.
 - Board webinars for first and final year Chinese medicine students.
 - The 'Managing complaints and your wellbeing' webinar hosted in July 2024 for registered Chinese medicine practitioners, students, and other interested persons.
- The Board's regulatory examinations, being the MCQ and OSCE.
- The Board's work in response to the Kruk review, by considering ways to streamline the application process for international applicants. It was noted that the Dawson review is ongoing and it anticipated to have a finalised report by December 2024.
- The annual review of the nomenclature compendium, used to inform the Board's guidelines for safe practice of Chinese herbal medicine.
- Recent updates to standards, codes, guidelines, and FAQs, being:
 - English language skills registration standard
 - FAQ on virtual care
 - Guidelines on 'meeting your professional obligations when using Artificial Intelligence in healthcare'.
 - Updates to the Chinese Medicine advertising examples
- Public consultations released over the previous 12 months:
 - Guidelines on patient health records. The group was advised that the Board is currently reviewing responses to the public consultation before finalising its decision.
 - Review of the multi-profession criminal history registration standard. The group was advised that submissions to the consultation are to be published soon and a decision is yet to be finalised.
- The Board's commitment to international collaboration to foster shared learning and workforce mobility.
- Ahpra's ongoing work on improving Cultural Safety within Australian healthcare.
- The establishment of Ahpra's Regulatory Intelligence Function.

The Chair welcomed and answered questions from the group before concluding his presentation.

4. Presentation from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)

Practitioner member Mr Luke Hubbard introduced Mr Avinash Clarke, Assistant Secretary, Complementary and Over the Counter Medicine Branch at the TGA.

Mr Clarke provided an overview of his work with the TGA, the Scheduling of substances within Australia and how the TGA regulations relate to Chinese medicine practice.

More information about how the TGA is responsible for regulating the supply, import, export, manufacturing, and advertising of therapeutic goods can be found at the [TGA website](#).

5. Engagement with diverse communities

Community member Ms Sophy Athan introduced Ms Carol Nader, Ahpra State Manager for NSW.

Ms Nader provided a presentation and facilitated discussion in relation to addressing healthcare inequalities for diverse communities under the [National Scheme Engagement Strategy 2023-2025](#).

Ms Nader advised that the priority populations for this project are:

- Multicultural communities
- Victim-survivors of family violence
- People living with a disability
- People with chronic mental health issues
- The aged
- Children and young people.

Ms Nader noted the importance of avoiding harmful terminology such as 'vulnerable' when describing people from these communities. Ms Nader summarised the barriers to safe healthcare experienced by these communities, outlined current plans to address these barriers and discussed the key challenges of engaging with these groups.

6. Building Trust and Confidence in Regulation

Community member Ms Stephanie Campbell introduced Ms Susan Biggar, National Manager of Regulatory Experience and Engagement and Ms Monica Lambley, National Manager of Notifications to present and facilitate discussion about building trust and confidence within the regulatory system.

An overview of the notifications data for Chinese medicine was provided, as well as deidentified feedback to Ahpra from notifiers and practitioners who had been through the process. The group was further advised of the ongoing work to improve practitioner wellbeing and process efficiencies, including the 'strengthening practice' approach adopted by Ahpra and the National Boards for certain low-risk notifications.

Table discussions were shared with the group about the barriers to public trust and confidence in regulation and how these may be overcome.

The group agreed that the information was informative and insightful, and that deidentified case studies would be helpful to understand the concerns reported and possible outcomes of these in future.

7. Outcomes-focused accreditation – standard and quality of practice

Practitioner member Ms Johannah Shergis introduced Mr Michael Carpenter, Specialist Accreditation Advisor, noting that he had provided a recording due to being overseas. Mr Carpenter sent his apologies to the group, noting Mr Ian Walker was available in person to address any queries.

Mr Carpenter provided an overview of the accreditation process for National Boards to endorse an approved program of study, and the considerations made by Boards in doing so.

Mr Walker answered queries from the group following the presentation.

8. Evaluation

Practitioner member Ms Bing Tian and Executive Officer Ms Kirsten Hibberd requested feedback from the group about the running and content of the event. The group provided positive feedback, noting that all topics were informative and offered fruitful discussion.

9. Conference close

The Chair summarised the topics discussed, thanked attendees for their participation and closed the conference.

10. Next meeting

To be advised

References / related documents

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy](#)

[Ahpra Artificial Intelligence Guidelines](#)

[Ahpra Statement in response to announcement of Dawson review](#)

[Ahpra Statement in response to the Kruk Review final report](#)

[Consultations](#)

[CMBA Advertising guidelines](#)

[CMBA Communiqués](#)

[CMBA FAQs for Chinese medicine practitioners who provide virtual care](#)

[CMBA Guidelines for safe practice of Chinese herbal medicine](#)

[CMBA Health profession demographic snapshot](#)

[CMBA Presentations](#)

[CMBA Reference Group](#)

[CMBA Regulatory examinations](#)

[CMBA Statistics](#)

[National Scheme's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy](#)

[National Scheme Engagement Strategy 2023-2025](#)