

## Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Thursday 29 July 2021. The meeting was chaired by Nello Marino from the Australian Podiatry Association.

### The Professions Reference Group discussed the following:

- The notifier support service, established to provide procedural support to notifiers in sexual boundary and sexual misconduct matters involving registered health practitioners, has advertised for two social worker roles as part of the service. It is expected that the first role will be filled by late August and the second in mid-September 2021. The service will be fully functional from then.
- The [new-look public register](#) has been launched with enhanced search capabilities to help the public make more informed decisions about their healthcare. Feedback from this phase will help subsequent work planned to improve functionality of the public register.
- There is a renewed uptake in accessing the pandemic response sub-register's 26,600 practitioners, particularly in the context of the nursing profession and the demands of the vaccination rollout. Ahpra is working with jurisdictions about what other related support can help them.
- The Agency Management Committee is finalising the membership and terms of reference for the new accreditation committee in line with the [Health Ministers' policy direction](#) issued earlier this year and as a key element of the [Health Ministers' response to the Independent Review of Accreditation Systems Final Report](#). ([Media release](#) published after the meeting.)
- The Senate Community Affairs References Committee's inquiry of the work of Ahpra and the National Scheme has had two days of public hearings – 115 written submissions received with about 50 published.
- The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and Ahpra have published a [joint statement](#) about the promotion of COVID-19 vaccinations which sought to clarify TGA's recent regulatory changes in how healthcare professionals can communicate to the public about COVID-19 vaccines.
- Ahpra and the National Boards have released a [statement](#) reminding practitioners that there is no place for sexism, sexual harassment or gendered violence in healthcare. Ahpra and the National Boards explicitly condemn this behaviour by registered health practitioners.
- There have been nearly 82,000 registration applications this year with 2,700 of those from international medical graduates, a 17 per cent decrease from the previous year. This is likely the result of travel restrictions in response to COVID-19.
- The Nursing and Midwifery Board renewal period has been completed and Ahpra employed a new approach to triage adverse disclosures. Sending an SMS message to practitioners still to apply in the final days of the lodgement period was also well received and picked up some who may have inadvertently lapsed their registration. Both these improved processes worked well and will be incorporated into renewal campaigns for other professions.
- Public consultation on the draft revised *Regulatory principles* for the National Scheme has concluded, and the overall feedback supported the proposed changes. Specific suggestions for amendment focused on principles five and six as well as the inclusion of cultural safety in the revised regulatory principles. National Boards and the Agency Management Committee (AManC) are being asked to approve the final draft of the revised regulatory principles at their next meetings. Implementation, including communication and engagement activities, are planned during September and October 2021.
- Ahpra is developing a *Data strategy* to align with the *2020-25 National Scheme strategy* that will provide direction for key strategic priorities. The aim of the *Data strategy* is to bring together into a single roadmap, various workplans and strategies from across Ahpra's data landscape. The intent is

to provide strategic oversight of the management and use of data, remove duplication of effort, and provide direction for key strategic priorities of the *2020-25 National Scheme strategy*. The AManC and the Forum of National Registration and Accreditation Scheme Chairs support a targeted consultation with the PRG and further discussion will be scheduled.

The next PRG meeting is on Wednesday 8 September 2021, 3pm to 4pm.

**Nello Marino**

Chair  
Professions Reference Group