

## Communiqué

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### April and May 2021 meetings of the Dental Board of Australia

The Dental Board of Australia (the Board) held its 128<sup>th</sup> and 129<sup>th</sup> meetings on Friday 30 April and Friday 28 May respectively. The Board and its committees continue to meet via video conferencing since March 2020.

This communiqué highlights the key discussions and considerations covered during the Board meetings and other relevant information. We publish this communiqué on our website and email it to a broad range of stakeholders. We encourage you to distribute it to colleagues and interested parties, including within your work or organisation.

#### Public Register enhancement program

Work is underway to implement a phased approach to agreed enhancements to the search functionality of the public register, as well as new security measures to address screen scraping activity. Some of the changes agreed to by the Board include:

- increased prominence of the register on the Ahpra homepage so it's easier to find
- simplified language with pop-up information boxes, and
- improved search functionality, including:
  - predictive text
  - phonetic searching capability
  - search by location (so in addition to being able to 'check' your practitioner, you will also be able to 'find/search for' a registered practitioner in a particular area. For example, you may want to look for a physiotherapist in Carlton, who's a woman and speaks Greek), and
  - refined search filters (including being able to search by the 15 most common community languages).
- the CAPTCHA check is no longer required except if someone does six searches in a minute. In that case, they will need to complete a CAPTCHA to prove that they're not a bot.
- the register continues to limit the number of results to 50, which is another measure to deter screen scraping activity. The additional search filters aim to help genuine users refine a search to less than 50 results to find the practitioner they are looking for, without encouraging screen scrapers to search for lists of practitioners with certain characteristics.

Improvements are due for release late July.

#### Proposed all National Boards position statement - No place for sexual harassment or violence in healthcare

The Board agreed to a joint 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. The statement reinforces the important role registered practitioners have in building and maintaining a culture of respect in healthcare. Ahpra and the National Boards encourage speaking up about disrespectful behaviour and unprofessional conduct to support a safer healthcare system for everyone.

Unprofessional conduct, including sexual harassment or assault is contrary to the National Boards' codes of conduct (or equivalent). The position statement reinforces the professional, respectful behaviour expected of registered health practitioners. This includes always communicating professionally and respectfully with and about others, including when using social media.

#### Review of list of substantially equivalent qualifications

The Board's recognition of qualifications gained overseas is embedded in the General Registration for overseas-qualified dental practitioners registration standard. The registration standard refers to the List of approved qualifications from overseas jurisdictions which is published on the Board's website. The list may be amended from time to time. As the list has been in place since the National Scheme came into effect, the Board is undertaking a review of the list of substantially equivalent qualifications.

### **Removal of approval end dates from Board approved programs of study**

The Board agreed to remove the approval end dates from the Board's approved programs of study.

Following an accreditation or reaccreditation process, the Australian Dental Council (ADC) accredits programs of study against approved accreditation standards for a specified period of time (differs for each of the divisions). Under the National Law, if the ADC decides to accredit a program, it is required to provide the Board with a report about its accreditation of the program. The Board can then decide to approve or refuse to approve the program as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration in the dental profession.

The Board has historically applied end dates to its approval of programs of study, to mirror end dates for accreditation of those programs by the ADC. However, this causes delays in the reaccreditation processes and under the National Law, the Board is not bound to apply an end date to approval of a program. The Board therefore decided to remove the approval end dates from its approved programs of study. The advantageous of this are that it:

- streamlines processes
- represents a risk-based approach, as approval is only cancelled where there is reason to do so, and
- reduces the risk that providers perceive the approval end date to represent a guaranteed approval up until the end date.

Where a program's accreditation is revoked by the ADC, approval is deemed to be cancelled under section 51 of the National Law.

### **National Committee appointments**

In the past month, the Board invited applications for positions on its decision-making national committees. Established to review, assess and make decisions on notification matters (complaints) and applications for registration, the national committees are the:

- Immediate Action Committee
- Notification Committee Assessment
- Notification and Compliance Committee
- Registration and Compliance Committee.

The Board appointed a total of 23 members to its committees, six new to the National Scheme. The Board looks forward to welcoming the successful applicants to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme as they will make a valuable contribution to the work of the Board and to the dental profession.

### **Present in person policy**

Presenting in person is required for medical practitioners under Registration Standards and for all other professions by the Proof of Identity Policy.

The effect on international travel as a result of COVID-19 has been significant and affects the capacity for overseas qualified practitioners who have applied for registration in Australia, to enter Australia and satisfy their ID check requirements to complete the registration process.

Throughout the pandemic, National Boards approved flexible application of some registration requirements, including the requirement to present in person to complete the ID requirements.

In December 2020 all National Boards agreed:

- that for new applications for registration that met the In-Principle registration threshold, the period to present in person will be extended from 3 to 6 months, and
- where an extension was requested for an existing application that had previously been approved In-Principle, the period to present in person will be extended until 30 June 2021

As international travel restrictions are still largely in place and are unlikely to be relaxed greatly before the end of 2021, the Board approved to extend the date for applicants to present in person to 31 January 2022.

### **Dental Practitioner Support service**

Support for dental practitioners who need someone to talk to is just a quick phone call or click away.

Dental Practitioner Support is a national 24/7 health and wellbeing support service for all dental practitioners. Anyone using it does not have to give their name and can seek support anonymously.

The service offers health and wellbeing support to all dental practitioners, including dentists, dental prosthetists, oral health therapists, dental hygienists and dental therapists. It is also available to dental students, educators, employers, Australian Dental Council exam candidates and concerned family members and friends.

While funded by the Board, the service is run independently by [Turning Point](#), a leading addiction treatment, research and education organisation based in Victoria. This means practitioners can have complete confidence in reaching out for confidential support.

Access Dental Practitioner Support:

- 1800 377 700
- [dpsupport.org.au](https://dpsupport.org.au)

We ask all our stakeholders to continue to promote the service widely.

### **Are your contact details up to date?**

Your contact details must be up to date to receive renewal reminders from Ahpra and information from the Board. You can check your details via the login icon at the top right of the [Ahpra website](#). Your email settings may need to be changed to receive emails from Ahpra or the Board and to avoid misdirection to junk mail.

### **Conclusion**

The Board publishes a range of information about registration and the Board's expectations of practitioners on its website at [www.dentalboard.gov.au](http://www.dentalboard.gov.au) or [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au). More information on the Board's work is also available in the Board's regular newsletter. Read the latest edition, [March 2021](#).

For more information about or help with regulatory issues, please send an [online enquiry form](#) or contact Ahpra on 1300 419 495.

Dr Murray Thomas

**Chair, Dental Board of Australia**

May 2021