

Ahpra

Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health
Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2020

A Social Research Project

November 2020

Supplementary report prepared for:

The Optometry Board of Australia

Truly Deeply

Introduction

Truly Deeply was first engaged in 2018 by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) to assess the perception and sentiment towards Ahpra and the National Boards.

The review was intended to help National Boards and Ahpra better understand what stakeholders think and feel about them and to identify how to facilitate ongoing confidence and trust in the work performed by Ahpra and the National Boards.

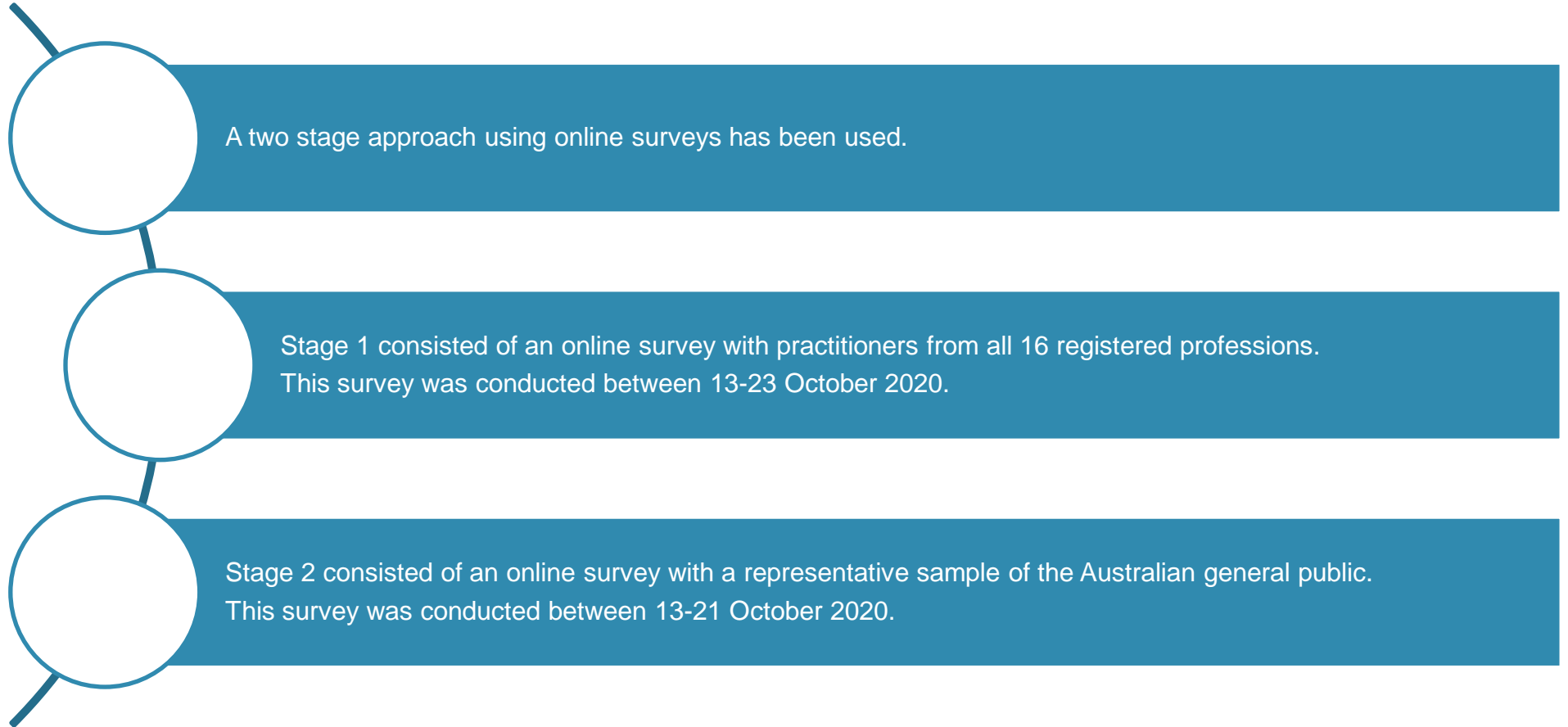
The benchmark 2018 study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically extended interviews (face-to-face and via the telephone), focus groups and online surveys.

Given the value of the insights delivered through the 2018 benchmark study to Ahpra and National Boards, the decision was taken to update the quantitative measures by conducting the online survey with practitioners and the general public in November 2019 and most recently in October 2020.

The purpose of this report is to present, discuss and consolidate the findings and insights from the 2020 surveys and to make comparisons, where appropriate, with the 2018 and 2019 results.

- A single, integrated report has been provided to Ahpra documenting the key themes and results.
- A separate summary has been provided for each of the National Boards based on the results of the online survey with practitioners.
- The purpose of this report is to present a subset of findings specifically for the **Optometry Board of Australia**.

An overview of the methodology



Quantitative approach

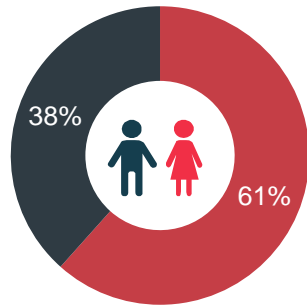
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community.
- The 2020 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 and 2019 questionnaires, with two additional questions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider. Quotas were placed on the sample for gender, age and location to ensure a nationally representative sample was achieved.
- Participants in the Practitioner Survey were sourced by Ahpra (using software that allowed the survey to be deployed to a random sample of practitioners in each profession).
- The practitioner sample has been weighted to ensure an equal 'voice' within the total sample of registered health practitioners (with the sample of 'nurses' and 'midwives' further separated). This has been done to ensure that the views of professions with larger numbers of practitioners do not outweigh the views of professions with much smaller numbers of practitioners.
- For comparison between the sub-analysis groups, chi square or independent tests were conducted as appropriate, with significant differences at the 95% confidence interval indicated where applicable.

	Community Survey	Practitioner Survey
Fieldwork dates	13-21 October	13-23 October
Responses	2,020	10,228
Email invitations sent	na	138,453
Response rate	na	7.4%

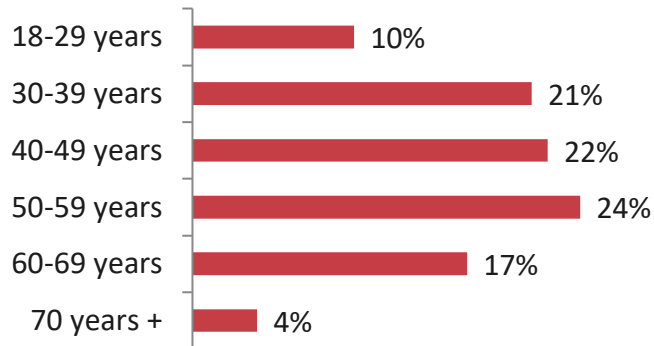


2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

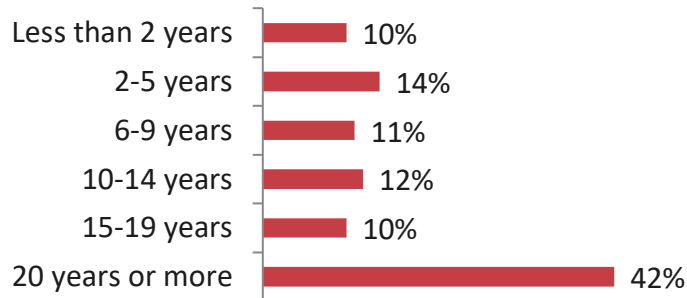
Gender



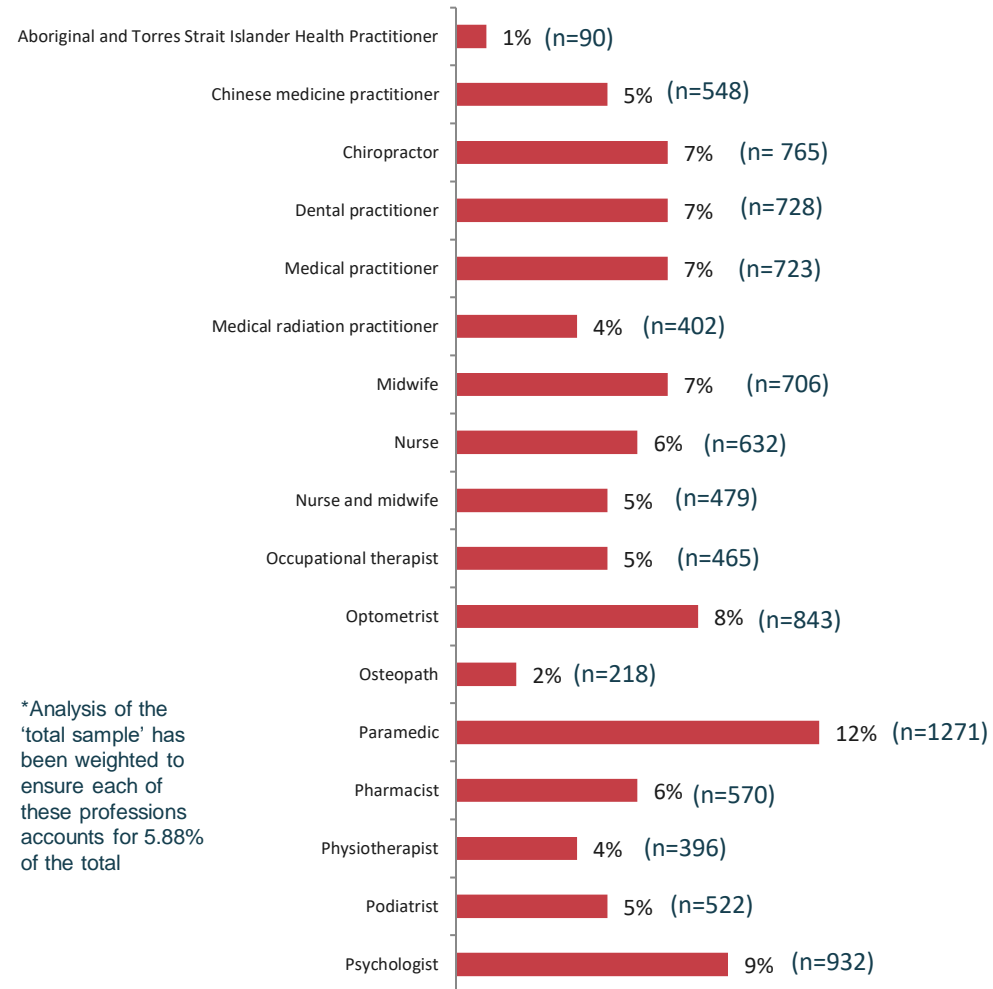
Age



Years in practice



Practitioner type*

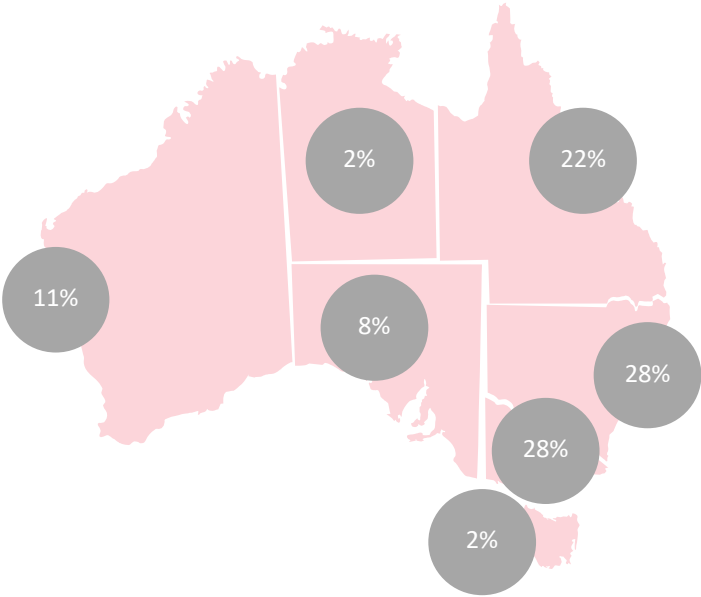


*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

* Figures may not add to 100%. Missing figures accounted for by 'prefer not to say'

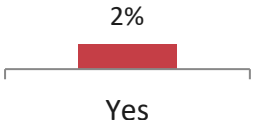
2020 sample of registered practitioners (n = 10,228)

Location

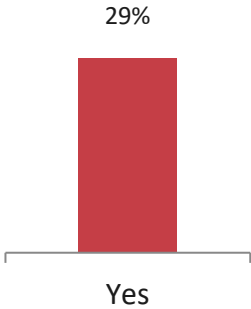


Metro: **63%**
Regional: **30%**
Rural: **7%**

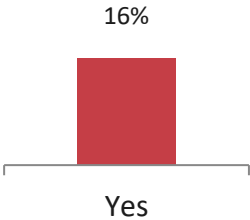
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



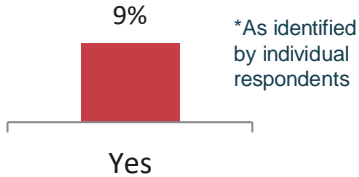
% who were born in a country other than Australia



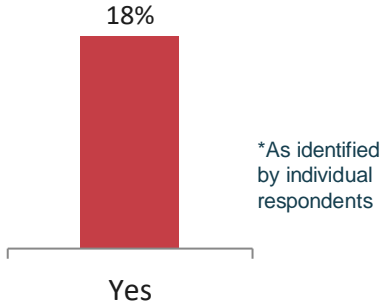
% who speak a language other than English at home



% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board*



% who have been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards*

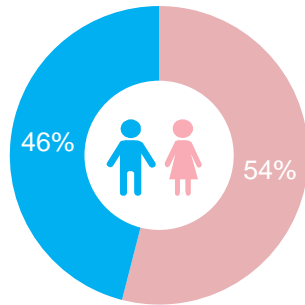


Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners

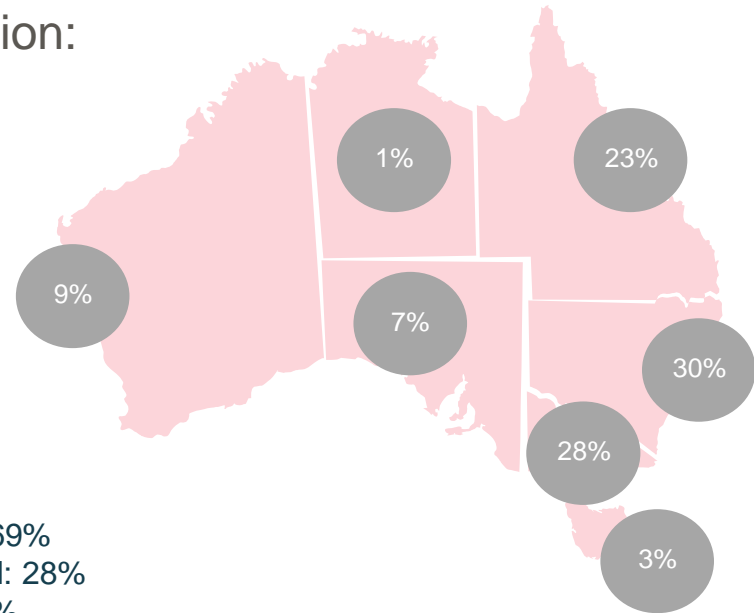
Specific insights into the responses from:
Optometrists

Sample of optometrists (n=843)

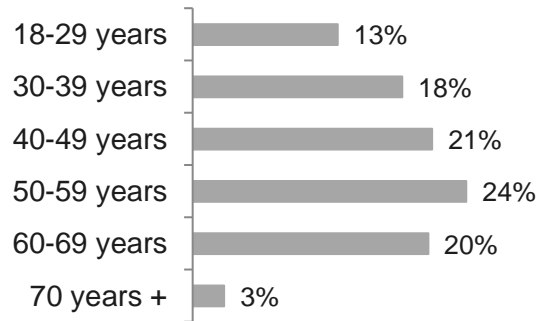
Gender:



Location:

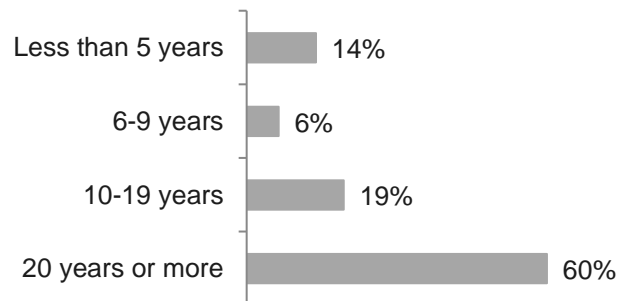


Age:

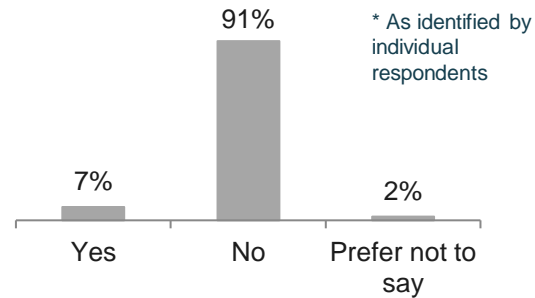


Metro: 69%
Regional: 28%
Rural: 3%

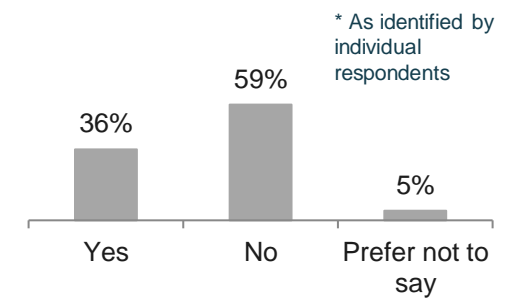
Years in practice:



% who have had a complaint about them made to Ahpra or their National Board*



% who have been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards*



2020: Perceptions of the optometry profession among practitioners (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words do you strongly associate with your profession?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=843)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	63%	(+17%)
Knowledgeable	38%	(+8%)
Competent	29%	(+9%)
Caring	27%	(-1%)
Responsible	26%	(+7%)
Trusted	24%	(+1%)
Respected	23%	(+3%)
Approachable	19%	(+8%)
Community minded	19%	(+4%)
Dedicated	16%	(-5%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Reputable	16%	(+7%)
Hard working	15%	(-14%)
Committed	13%	(-4%)
Empathetic	13%	(-7%)
Compassionate	10%	(-13%)
Friendly	10%	(+3%)
Honest	8%	(-1%)
Independent	8%	(-)
Efficient	8%	(+2%)
Passionate	6%	(-7%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2019-20:

Perceptions of the optometry profession among practitioners

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with your profession?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=381	2020 N=843
Professional	57%	63%
Knowledgeable	43%	38%
Competent	35%	29%
Caring	20%	27%
Responsible	23%	26%
Trusted	20%	24%
Respected	20%	23%
Approachable	20%	19%
Community minded	15%	19%
Dedicated	13%	16%

% of practitioners with that perception of the profession	2019 N=381	2020 N=843
Reputable	14%	16%
Hard working	16%	15%
Committed	12%	13%
Empathetic	12%	13%
Compassionate	12%	10%
Friendly	11%	10%
Honest	9%	8%
Independent	6%	8%
Efficient	8%	8%
Passionate	6%	6%

Green indicates a result significantly higher result in 2020 compared with the 2019 result.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower result in 2020 compared with the 2019 result

2020: Perceptions of the Optometry Board of Australia (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with the (National Board)?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=843)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
For practitioners	42%	(+11%)
Regulators	36%	(-2%)
Administrators	34%	(+1%)
Necessary	31%	(-)
Supportive	25%	(+10%)
Decision-makers	24%	(+1%)
Competent	24%	(+9%)
Advocates	24%	(+6%)
Helpful	21%	(+10%)
Approachable	19%	(+8%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
For the public	19%	(-1%)
Good communicators	19%	(+8%)
Bureaucratic	19%	(-7%)
Trustworthy	17%	(+5%)
Shows leadership	16%	(+3%)
Accessible	15%	(+5%)
Responsive	14%	(+5%)
Fair	12%	(+2%)
Honest	10%	(+3%)
Listens	9%	(+4%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-20: Perceptions of the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with the (National Board)?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

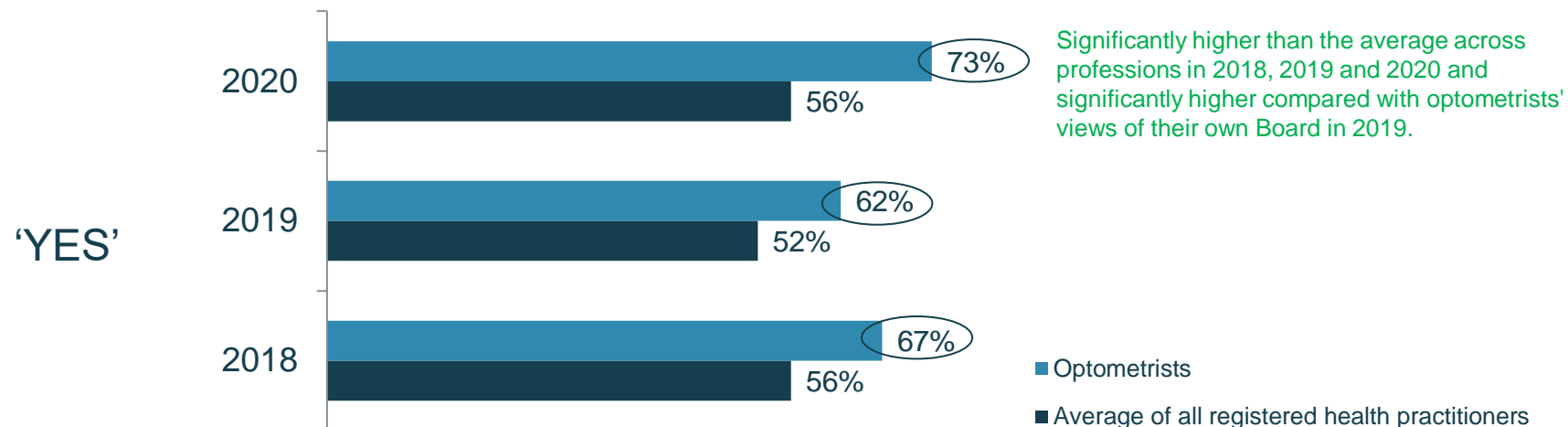
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=373	2019 N=381	2020 N=843	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=373	2019 N=381	2020 N=843
For practitioners	43%	36%	42%	For the public	21%	21%	19%
Regulators	34%	38%	36%	Good communicators	15%	11%	19%
Administrators	36%	35%	34%	Bureaucratic	20%	28%	19%
Necessary	36%	38%	31%	Trustworthy	20%	15%	17%
Supportive	23%	16%	25%	Shows leadership	16%	16%	16%
Decision-makers	27%	25%	24%	Accessible	18%	10%	15%
Competent	23%	23%	24%	Responsive	14%	9%	14%
Advocates	26%	21%	24%	Fair	14%	13%	12%
Helpful	15%	13%	21%	Honest	12%	9%	10%
Approachable	18%	15%	19%	Listens	11%	6%	9%

Green indicates a result significantly higher compared with the previous year.

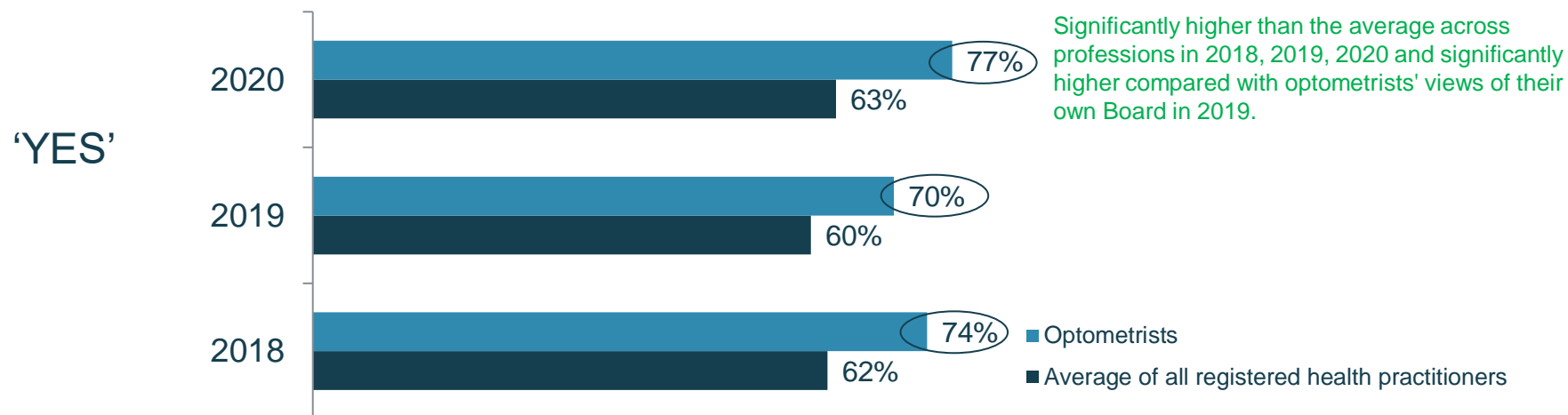
Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year.

Levels of confidence and trust in the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Do you feel confident that your National Board is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust your National Board?



The indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Optometry Board of Australia

Indicators of trust: **77% trust the Board**

They have guided optometrists during COVID-19 for best practice and liaised with appropriate parties for our interest.

They are involved in ensuring that optometrists keep up to date with professional development and skills.

They are dedicated to public protection through ensuring practitioner competence and scope expansion.

They are our advocates when it comes to dealing with government bodies.

A good balance of professional and general members to keep the profession on target.

Competent and trustworthy leaders that have everyone's best interest at heart.

I have been a member for 42 years and feel I have been well supported.

They have been very good at communicating to their members and seem 'fairly' transparent in its dealings.

The OBA provides up-to-date information including legal obligations and the responsibility of optometric practices. The information is easily accessible, and updates are notified fairly quickly.

Barriers to trust: **5% DO NOT trust the Board**

Not moving forward with the times with new and safe practices particularly therapeutic space.

There is one rule for small independent optometrists & a completely separate set of rules for multi-nationals.

They allowed optometry to become an industry controlled by corporate interests whose sole aim is to generate profit, even if this is at the expense of best clinical practice.

A lot more optometrists than needed and new universities continue to open. The public has completely lost respect in optometrists and treat us like retailers sometimes.

They have been unsupportive of vision care practitioners even though they are themselves optometrists and members of OA.

Full list of responses provided separately

2020: Perceptions of Ahpra among optometrists (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with Ahpra?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=843)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	54%	(+1%)
Administrators	49%	(+4%)
For the public	38%	(+5%)
Necessary	36%	(-)
Bureaucratic	35%	(-2%)
For practitioners	27%	(-1%)
Decision-makers	23%	(-)
Competent	15%	(+2%)
Rigid	12%	(-2%)
Controlling	12%	(-3%)

Perceptions in 2020	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Intimidating	11%	(-4%)
Trustworthy	11%	(+1%)
Fair	10%	(+1%)
Out of touch	9%	(-3%)
Good communicators	7%	(-)
Accessible	7%	(-2%)
Poor communicators	7%	(-6%)
Shows leadership	6%	(-2%)
Responsive	6%	(-2%)
Helpful	5%	(-2%)

Green indicates a result significantly higher in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result significantly lower in 2020 than the average across all professions.

Summary of changes 2018-20: Perceptions of Ahpra among optometrists

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with Ahpra?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	2018 N=373	2019 N=381	2020 N=843
Regulators	54%	53%	54%
Administrators	55%	51%	49%
For the public	40%	38%	38%
Necessary	37%	35%	36%
Bureaucratic	43%	42%	35%
For practitioners	23%	20%	27%
Decision-makers	14%	20%	23%
Competent	18%	15%	15%
Rigid	17%	17%	12%
Controlling	14%	16%	12%

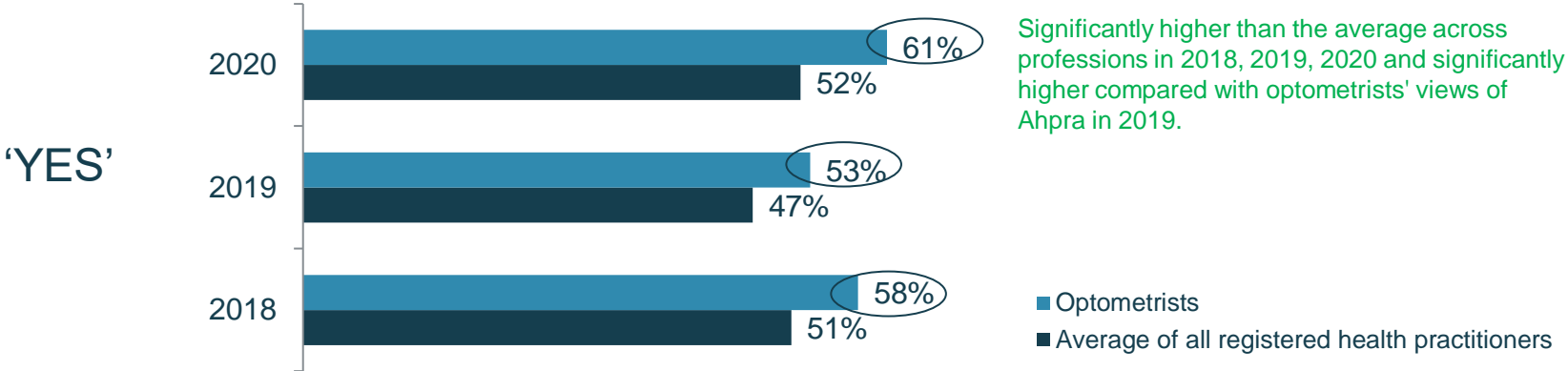
% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	2018 N=373	2019 N=381	2020 N=843
Intimidating	14%	14%	11%
Trustworthy	11%	10%	11%
Fair	12%	12%	10%
Out of touch	7%	10%	9%
Good communicators	5%	4%	7%
Accessible	10%	8%	7%
Poor communicators	9%	12%	7%
Shows leadership	3%	5%	6%
Responsive	7%	4%	6%
Helpful	6%	4%	5%

Green indicates a result significantly higher compared with the previous year.

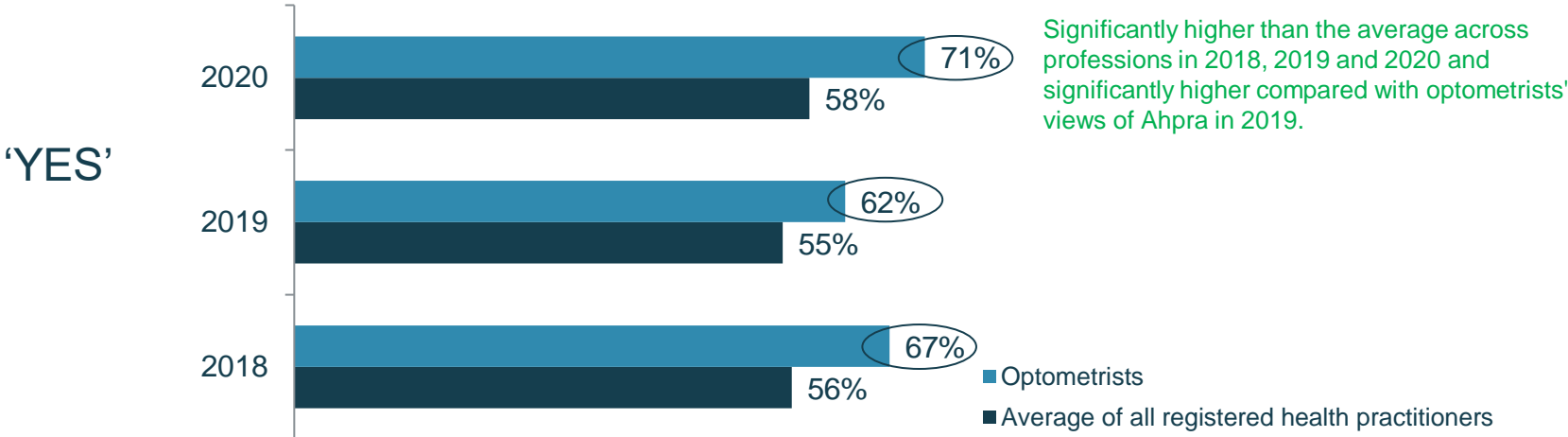
Orange indicates a result significantly lower compared with the previous year

Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among optometrists

Q. Do you feel confident that Ahpra is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust Ahpra?



The indicators of trust and barriers to trust in Ahpra among optometrists

Indicators of trust: 71% trust Ahpra

They keep track of registered professionals which in turn keeps that public safe.

Because they do random audits to see if practitioners meet their registration requirements.

As a licensing and regulatory body, they have been instrumental in support to the profession and protective of the community.

It would appear to have the right structure and people.

They have not given me any reason to question their competency.

They are responsible for upholding the law, If we don't trust them to carry out an unbiased regulatory service, why then would we have any standards or rules at all.

They appear to communicate and make decisions with the representatives of our profession in the form of the Optometry Board and Optometry Australia.

As overseers of a large group of varied professionals, I believe trustworthiness to be paramount. From my point of view, there appears to be no personal or specific group agendas within Ahpra which favour one profession over another.

Barriers to trust: 7% DO NOT trust Ahpra

The workers in Ahpra need to be health professionals themselves. The current staff are not qualified to deal with health-related complaints or notifications Spend too much time on non mandatory notifications and not on the mandatory notifications.

Although there is significant improvement, their efficiency is sometimes low, and usually due to under resourcing rather than individual incompetence.

I feel they are too rigid and not willing enough to look at situations covering different situations for individuals.

They represent the public and the government. The interests of those two don't always align with mine.

I don't understand why we need Ahpra when we have the optometry board. The registration fees tripled when Ahpra was created. I write this every year, and nothing has changed.

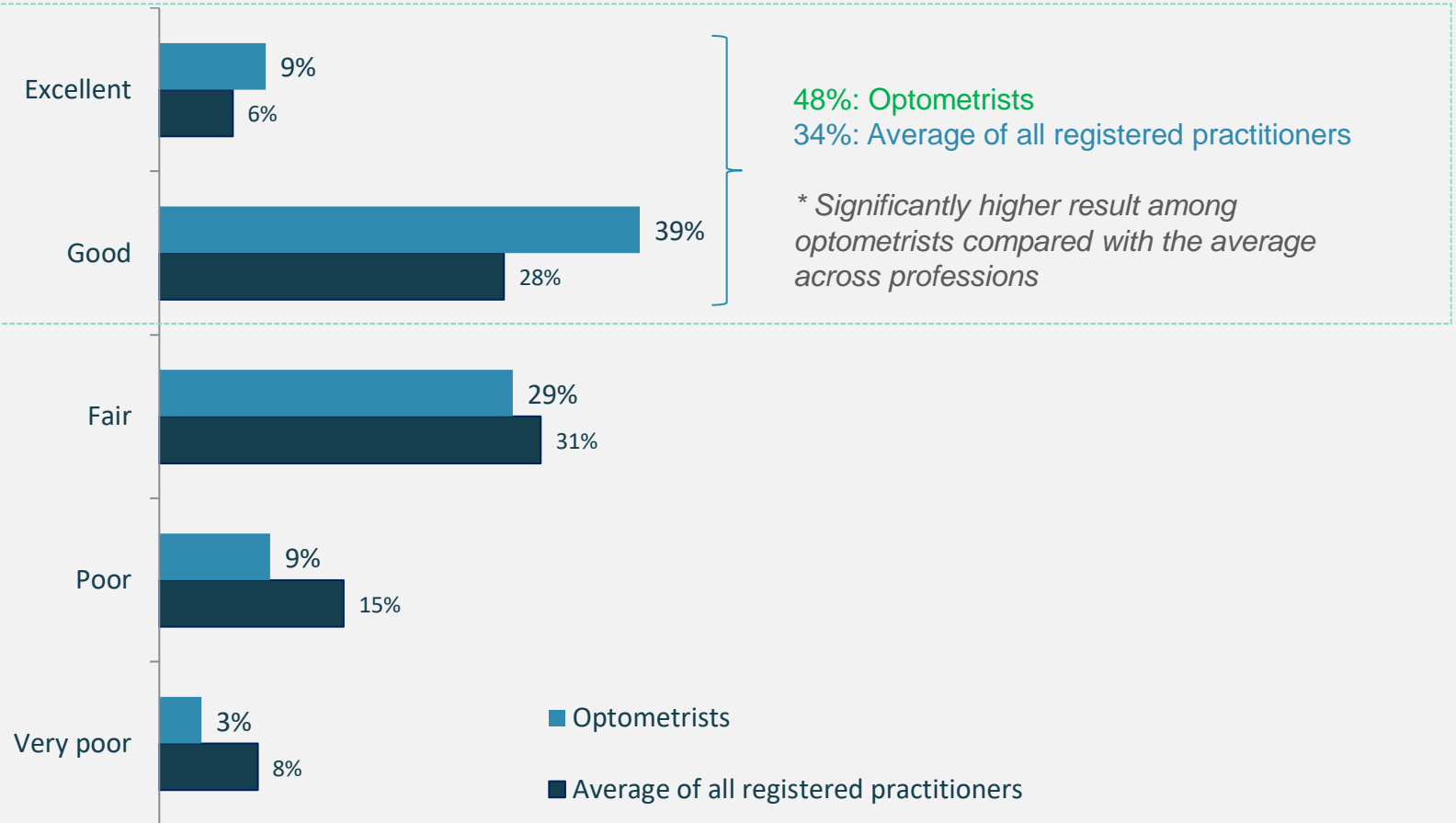
They only contact those in trouble and often don't see things from the health professional's perspective. If they contact, it's a 'guilty until proven innocent' scenario, even if patients have not followed instructions.

Full list of responses provided separately

Assessment of the level of support provided to practitioners from Ahpra and National Boards to maintain their professional practice

Q. How would you rate the level of support provided by National Boards and Ahpra for you to maintain or improve your professional practice?

Optometrists



Additional activities or support practitioners would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or the National Boards during the pandemic

Practitioners were asked what additional activities or support, if any, they would have liked to see from Ahpra and/or their National Board during the pandemic? Below is a sample of the open-ended responses provided.

(Full list of responses provided separately).

All boards need to publish data on cultural diversity of the professions beyond what other language do you use. My board oversees a profession with a majority of Asians but has no Asian members nor has it ever sought that data on cultural heritage.

Reduction in Ahpra fees for those who were unable to secure any work shifts. Reducing the work requirements for those who have not been able to work any number of hours since March 2020.

Faster processes, I am not the only health practitioner that has waited months for registration.

Guidance regarding Telehealth.

Clear directives on changes to CPD requirements rather than a "oh we're flexible, you can trust us" motherhood statement.

Stronger stance on optometry practices who continued business as usual during lockdowns.

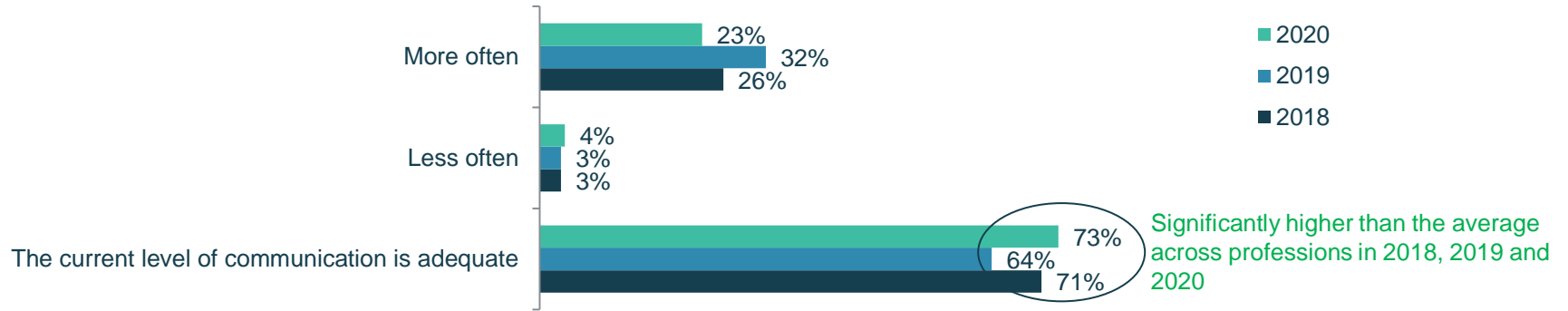
The early advice given by our national Board was conflicting in nature. They literally caused some practices to close unnecessarily through poor advice, and then later back-tracked from that advice to claim they had never officially provided advice to close.

I think that the support from such departments throughout the pandemic has been excellent in general.

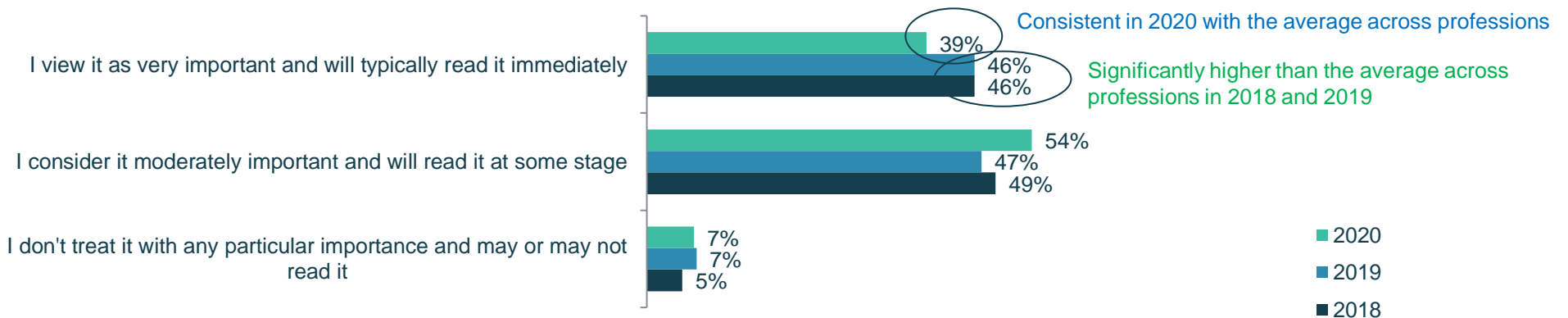
I feel the Optometry Board is reducing the flexibility of CPD requirements. The new time-based CPD system and especially the record keeping requirements that individual practitioners are now required to undertake seem unnecessarily onerous, and as a solo practitioner and small business operator, I resent the time I will now have to spend keeping a CPD journal, providing a learning plan with stated CPD goals, outcomes and reviews of each activity I undertake. I did not know that the system we are abandoning was flawed.

Response to communication by the Optometry Board of Australia

Q. Would you like (National Board) to communicate with you.....?



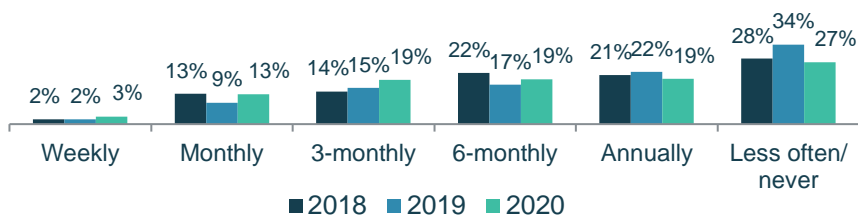
Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

Use of the Optometry Board of Australia website

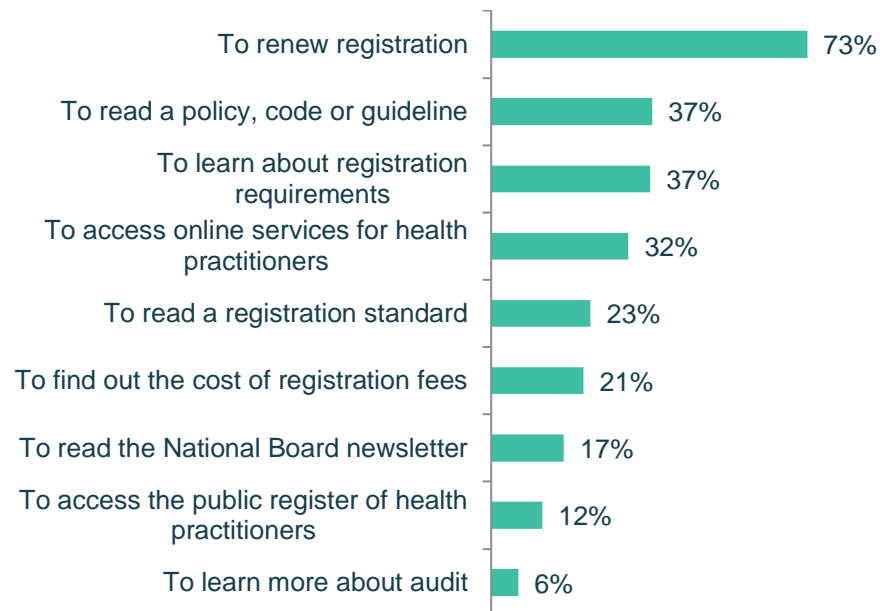
Q. How often do you visit the website of (your National Board)?



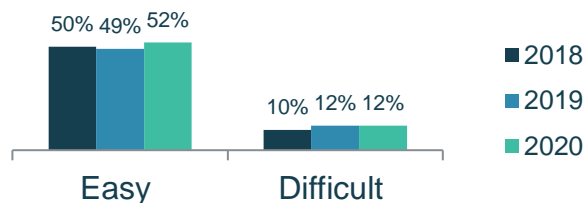
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this Board



2020: Reasons for visiting the National Board website

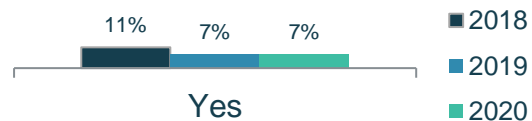


Q. How easy or difficult is it to find the information you were looking for on the (National Board) website?



Base: Practitioners who have visited that Board's website

Q. Is there any information you have looked for on the website of (National Board) but not been able to find?



Base: People who have visited that Board's website



Additional information sought by practitioners included (but was not limited to)...

- More detailed information about the upcoming change to CPD standards.
- Information about Medicare, and a list of prescribed medications.
- Information on therapeutic endorsements.
- Cultural heritage in the profession not what other language do you speak.
- Pandemic response statement.

Contact details

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