
Ahpra

Practitioner and community perceptions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards: 2019

A Social Research Project

November 2019

Supplementary report prepared for:
The Medical Board of Australia

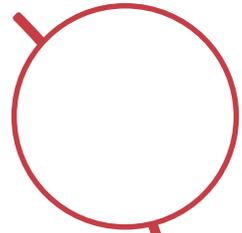
Truly[®]
Deeply



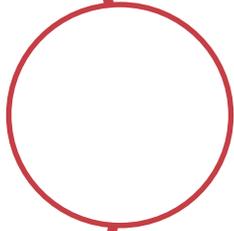
Introduction

- 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 the organisation 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.
- 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 Medical Board of Australia**.

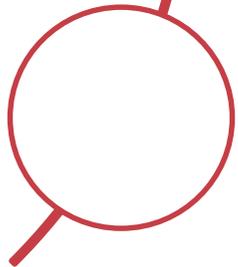
An overview of the methodology



A **two stage** approach using online surveys has been used.



Stage 1 consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 15 registered professions. This survey was conducted between October 30-November 8, 2019.

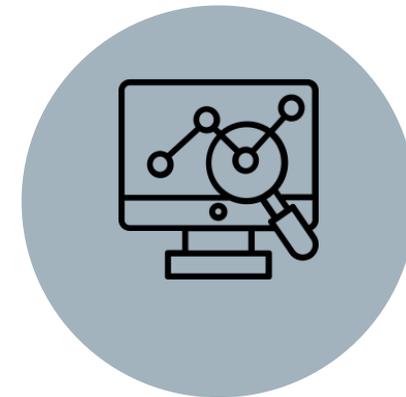


Stage 2 consisted of an online survey with a representative sample of the Australian general public. This survey was conducted between November 1– 6, 2019.

Quantitative approach

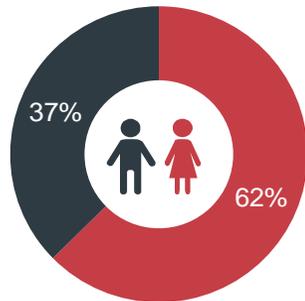
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community following the qualitative investigation.
- The 2019 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 questionnaires, with only a small number of additions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external 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	Nov 1-6	Oct 30 to Nov 8
Responses	2,048	5,944
Email invitations sent	na	109,625
Response rate	na	5.4%

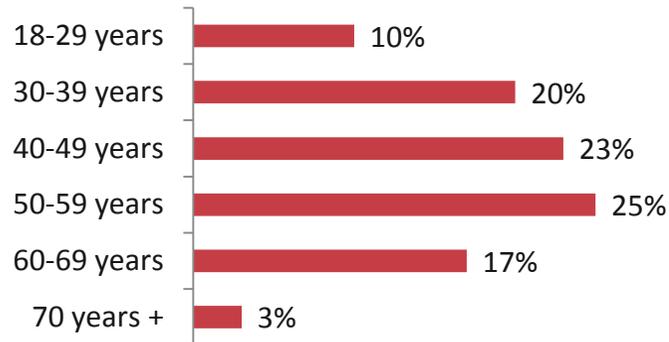


2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

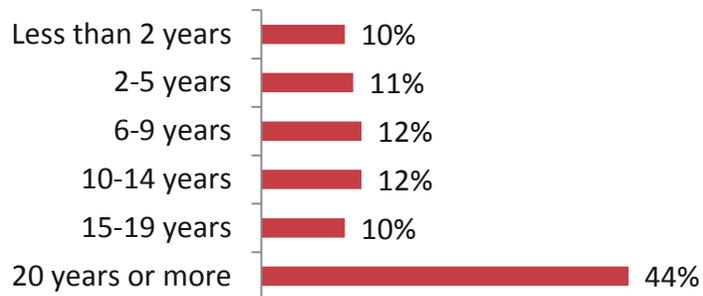
Gender



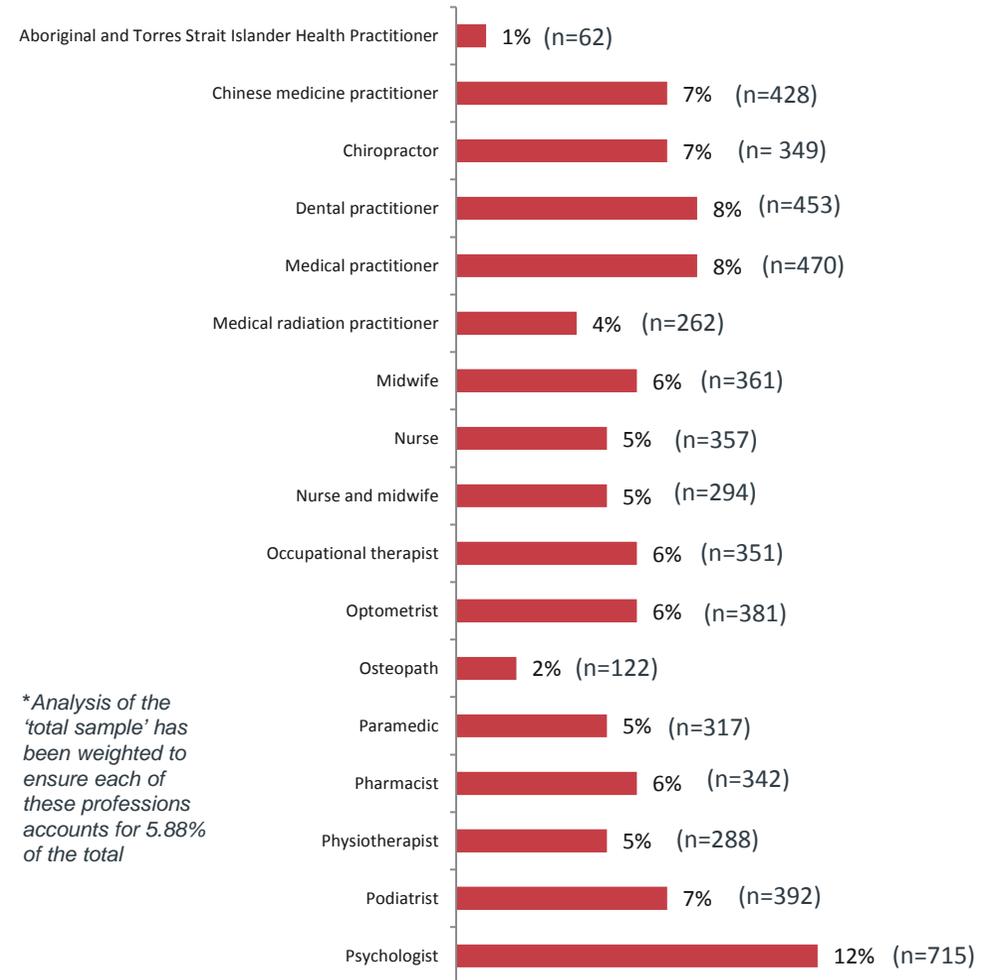
Age



Years in practice



Practitioner type*

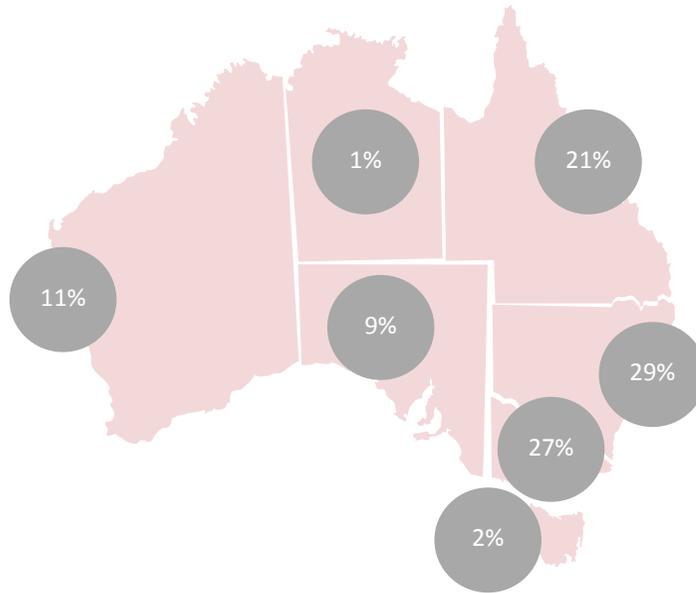


*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

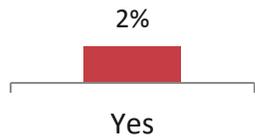
2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

Location

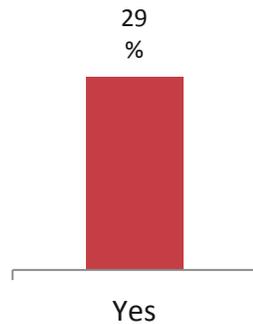


Metro: **64%**
Regional: **36%**

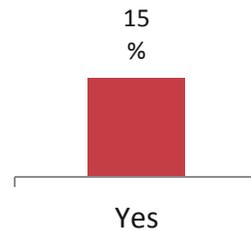
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



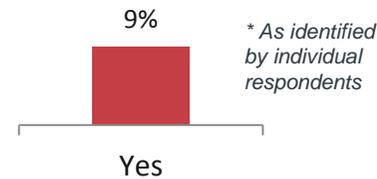
% who were born a country other than Australia



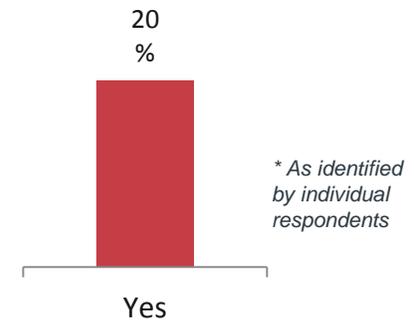
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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*

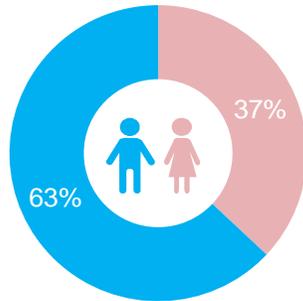


Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners.

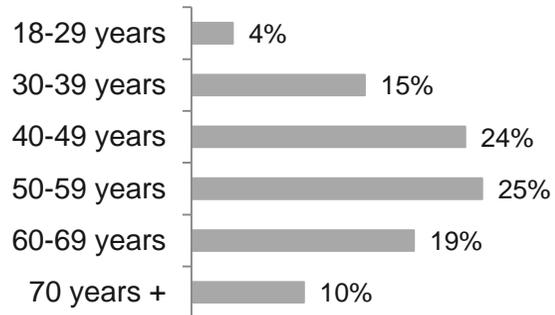
Specific insights into the responses from:
Medical practitioners

Sample of medical practitioners (n=470)

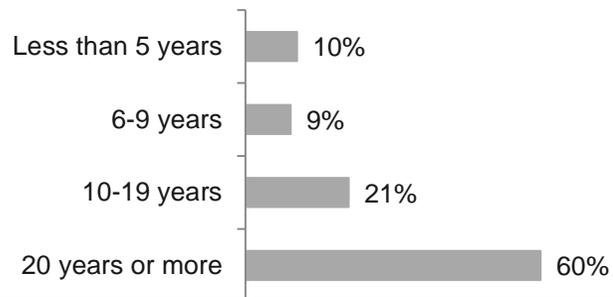
Gender:



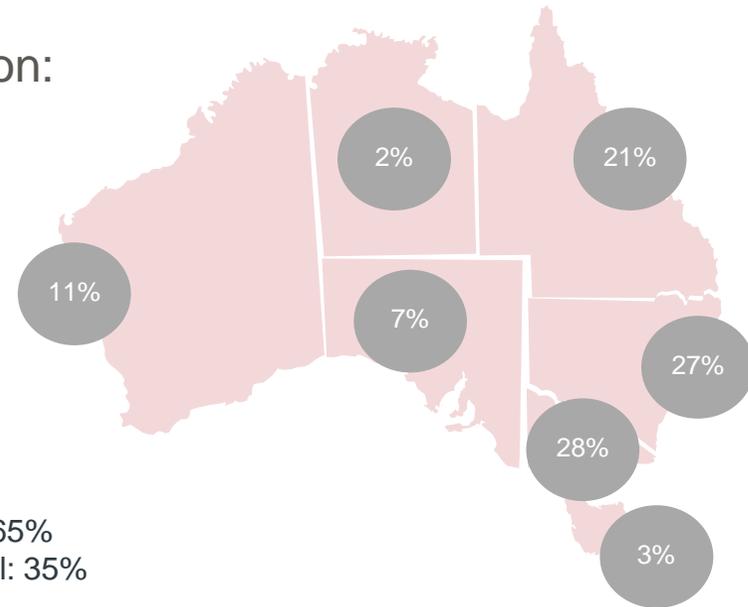
Age:



Years in practice:

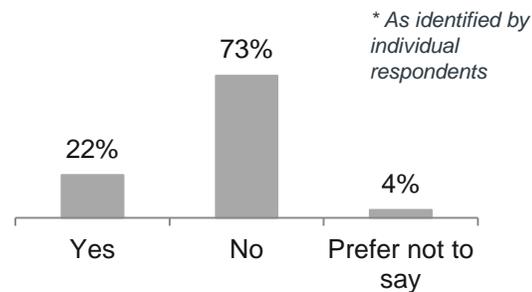


Location:

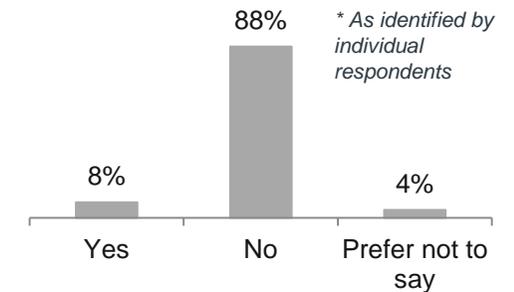


Metro: 65%
Regional: 35%

% 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*



2019: Perceptions of the medical 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=470)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	51%	(+4%)
Hard working	42%	(+12%)
Knowledgeable	37%	(+6%)
Dedicated	31%	(+10%)
Trusted	28%	(+6%)
Competent	27%	(+5%)
Responsible	26%	(+6%)
Caring	25%	(-3%)
Respected	24%	(+5%)
Compassionate	22%	(-3%)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Committed	20%	(+4%)
Empathetic	17%	(-5%)
Reputable	13%	(+3%)
Honest	12%	(+3%)
Community minded	9%	(-3%)
Independent	8%	(+1%)
Leaders	8%	(+5%)
Team orientated	7%	(-2%)
Passionate	5%	(-8%)
Influential	5%	(+3%)

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* than the average across all professions.

Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019* than the average across all professions.

* *New question for 2019*

2019: Perceptions of the Medical 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=470)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Bureaucratic	39%	(+12%)
Regulators	38%	(-2%)
Necessary	34%	(+1%)
Administrators	32%	(-2%)
For the public	23%	(-)
For practitioners	18%	(-14%)
Intimidating	18%	(+9%)
Decision makers	17%	(-7%)
Controlling	14%	(+5%)
Out of touch	14%	(+2%)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Poor Communicators	13%	(+2%)
Rigid	13%	(+3%)
Competent	12%	(-2%)
Secretive	12%	(+5%)
Fair	10%	(-1%)
Trustworthy	10%	(-1%)
Aloof	9%	(+3%)
Shows leadership	8%	(-5%)
Honest	6%	(-)
Advocates	5%	(-12%)

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

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

Summary of changes 2018-19:

Perceptions of the Medical 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=461	2019 N=470
Bureaucratic	39%	39%
Regulators	39%	38%
Necessary	32%	34%
Administrators	30%	32%
For the public	21%	23%
For practitioners	18%	18%
Intimidating	18%	18%
Decision makers	18%	17%
Controlling	17%	14%
Out of touch	14%	14%

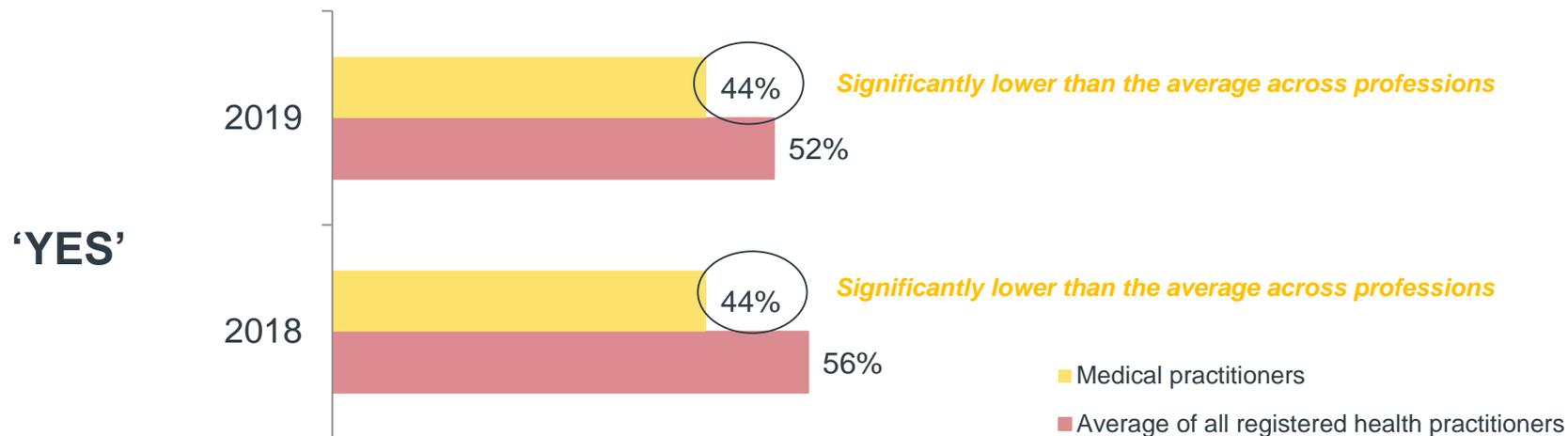
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=461	2019 N=470
Poor Communicators	15%	13%
Rigid	16%	13%
Competent	11%	12%
Secretive	12%	12%
Fair	8%	10%
Trustworthy	8%	10%
Aloof	10%	9%
Shows leadership	5%	8%
Honest	5%	6%
Advocates	6%	5%

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

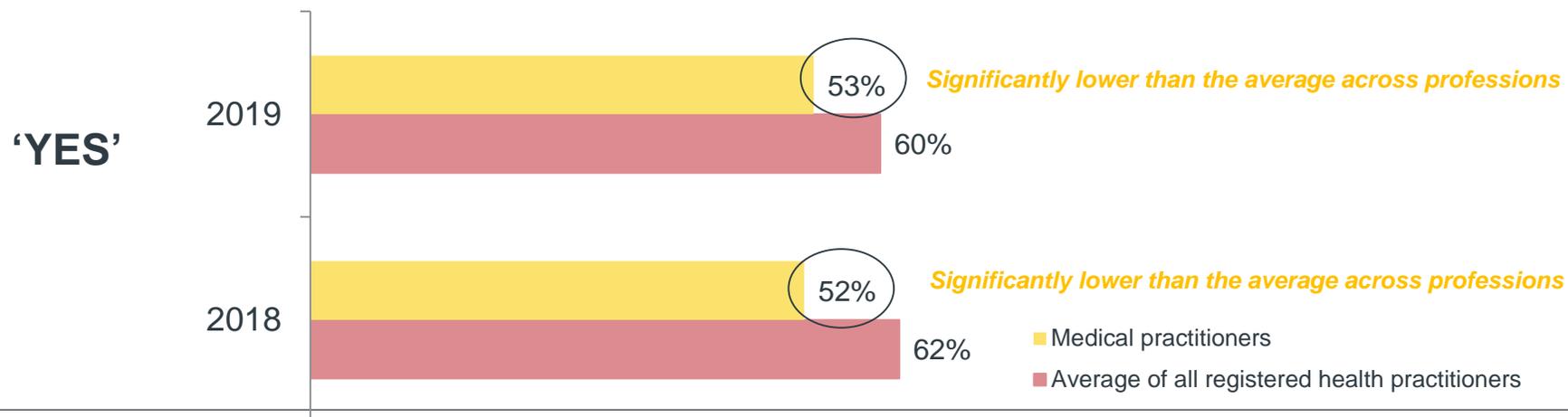
Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*. compared with the 2018 result

Levels of confidence and trust in the Medical 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?



What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Medical Board of Australia

Indicators of trust: **53% trust the Board**

Because I can see that they have made the hard decisions to penalise practitioners of all sorts that were operating outside the norm and putting patients at risk.

The correspondence I receive is always appropriate and considered.

They are a team of professionals guiding and supporting medical officers to work within the high standards set by them.

Just as much as you do everything to keep the public safe, I hope that you listen to the practitioner's side of complaints when there are issues. There are two sides to any story. I believe the board to act as an adjudicator more than a controller.

Honest and responsible people trying to do the right thing when faced with difficult problems.

In my long career I witnessed several local medical boards and each of the members were excellent performers and always acted professionally.

Full list of responses provided separately

Barriers to trust: **17% DO NOT trust the Board**

It appears as a hidden bureaucracy.

Decisions are slow; practitioners are not respected. Too risk averse and practitioners suffer as a result, without any additional benefit to the public.

Lots of anecdotal stories of the Board being unsupportive of practitioners during investigative processes causing severe mental health and professional consequences before any decision has been reached.

I believe they have no interest, with the exception of lip service to the health and wellbeing of practitioners. I believe their 'policing' of the profession is over-zealous and based on antiquated principles.

They are more interested in protecting their own reputation than protecting the public or helping doctors in trouble from stress and burn-out.

The only time I get any correspondence is when I get a bill or legal action against me. I dread hearing from the Medical Board.

2019: Perceptions of Ahpra among medical practitioners (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=470)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Bureaucratic	56%	(+17%)
Regulators	49%	(-4%)
Administrators	40%	(-6%)
Necessary	33%	(-3%)
For the public	30%	(-6%)
Intimidating	26%	(+10%)
Controlling	24%	(+9%)
Rigid	22%	(+6%)
Out of touch	21%	(+7%)
Poor communicators	19%	(+4%)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Secretive	14%	(+6%)
Aloof	13%	(+5%)
For practitioners	13%	(-14%)
Decision makers	10%	(-12%)
Zealous	9%	(+5%)
Fair	8%	(-2%)
Competent	7%	(-4%)
Trustworthy	6%	(-3%)
Accessible	6%	(-4%)
Supportive	5%	(-3%)

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

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

Summary of changes 2018-19:

Perceptions of Ahpra among medical practitioners

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 the Ahpra	2018 N=461	2019 N=470
Bureaucratic	52%	56%
Regulators	46%	49%
Administrators	47%	40%
Necessary	32%	33%
For the public	31%	30%
Intimidating	27%	26%
Controlling	26%	24%
Rigid	26%	22%
Out of touch	21%	21%
Poor communicators	24%	19%

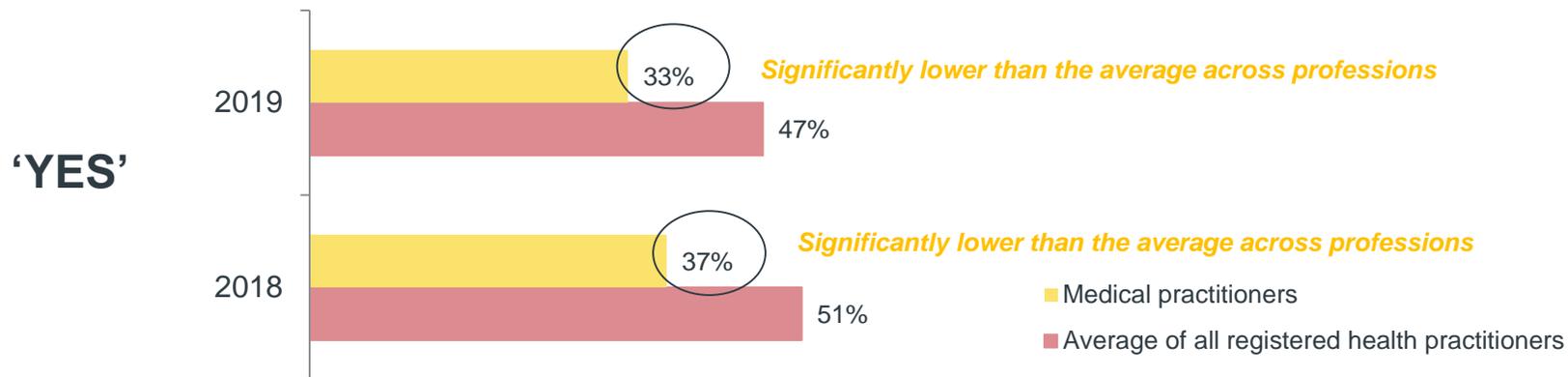
% of practitioners with that perception of the Ahpra	2018 N=461	2019 N=470
Secretive	14%	14%
Aloof	13%	13%
For practitioners	13%	13%
Decision makers	12%	10%
Zealous	10%	9%
Fair	8%	8%
Competent	10%	7%
Trustworthy	3%	6%
Accessible	7%	6%
Supportive	5%	5%

Green indicates a result *significantly higher in 2019* compared with the 2018 result.

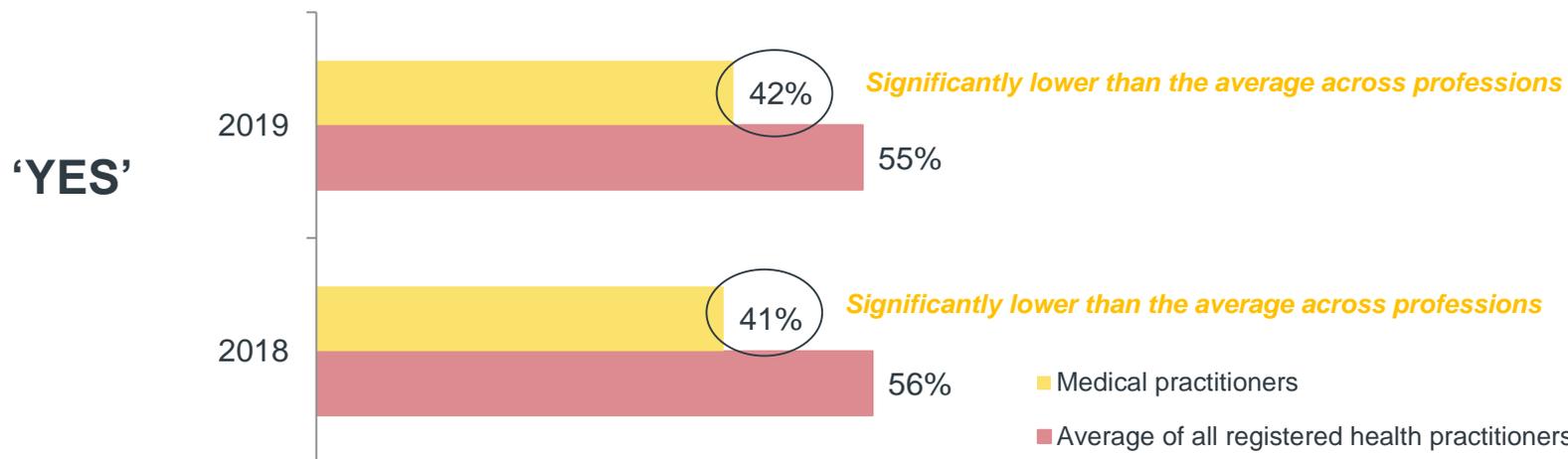
Orange indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*. compared with the 2018 result

Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among medical practitioners

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



Q. Do you trust **Ahpra**?



What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in Ahpra among medical practitioners

Indicators of trust: **42% trust Ahpra**

I trust Ahpra to work together with the Medical Board to deliver a safe well-regulated medical workforce.

I believe that they will take fair and honest measures to protect the community (public) as well as the practitioners.

It seems to be carrying out it's role as a registration agency.

They are a national registration body for all the health professions. They are doing the best they can.

They are a reliable source of information about registered health practitioners - in fact, they are the only reliable source of information about practitioners.

All my interactions over the last three years, though a little difficult and heavily bureaucratic, show the foundations to be very solid and competent.

Because it intelligently examines both frivolous and genuine complaints against practitioners, and it handles these extreme categories of complaints with uttermost discipline and professionalism.

Full list of responses provided separately

Barriers to trust: **30% DO NOT trust Ahpra**

It only seems to serve the purpose of charging different practitioners more than others just for the sake of registering practitioners. There is no information as to why some pay less than others. And then they seem to do very little if anything.

There is no transparency and no consideration of individual cases. They have so much power and can use it in any way they see fit. They are slow and faceless. They do not understand the complexity of medical care.

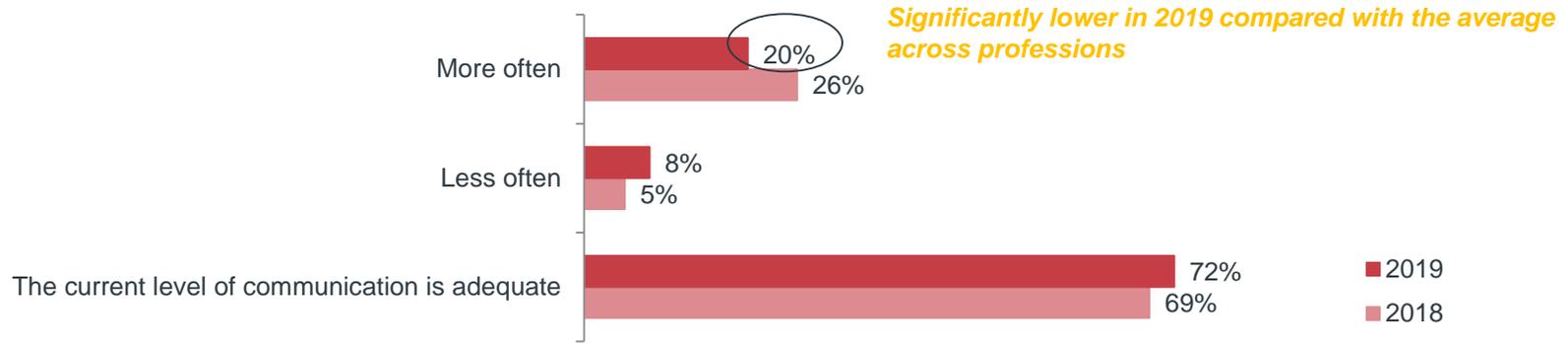
Decisions and investigations are appallingly slow. This hurts practitioners and the public.

I don't believe they have doctors' best interests at heart. They take our money (as in fees) and provide no benefit. If anything, they are a hindrance to mental health and well being of practitioners. Which has been illustrated time and time again with the poor outcomes of reporting and complaints handling.

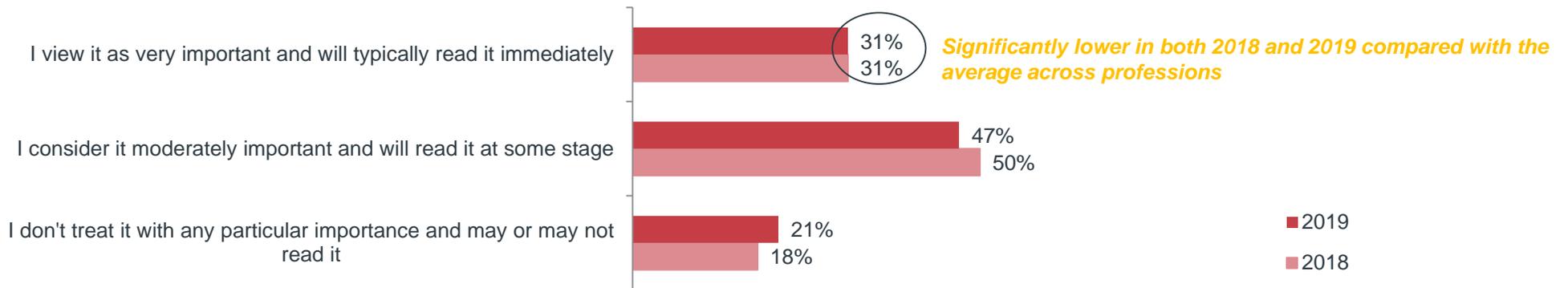
Some of the professions that are under its umbrella should not be as it gives them standing in the eyes of the public that they should not have and don't deserve.

Response to communication by the Medical Board of Australia

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



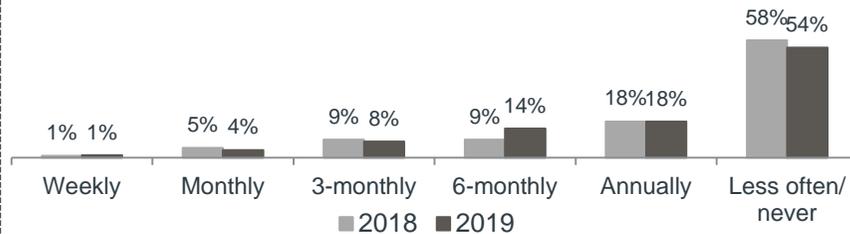
Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

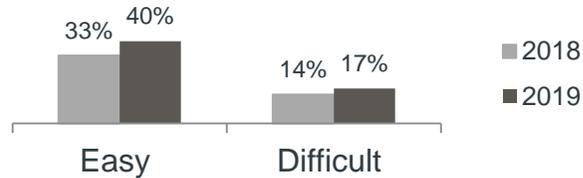
Use of the Medical Board of Australia website

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



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this board

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



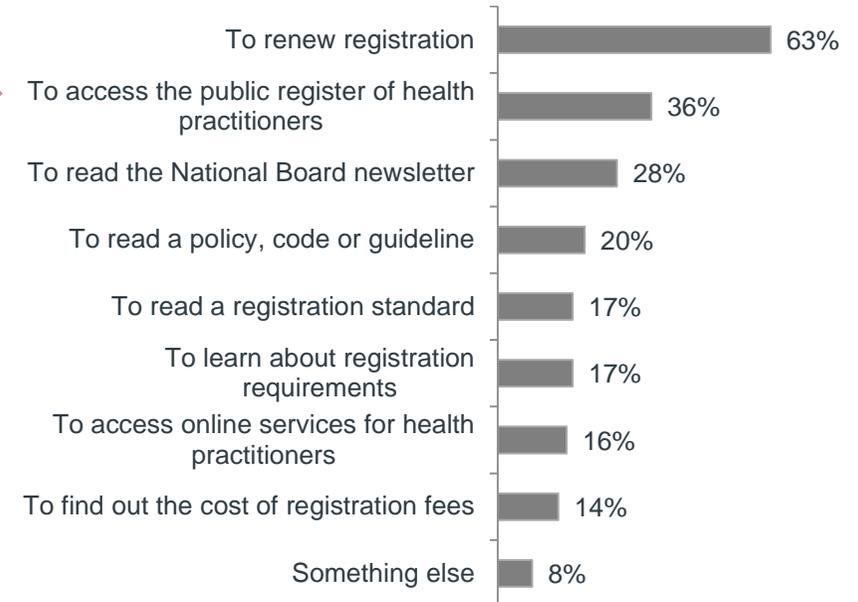
Base: Practitioners who have visited that board's website

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

2019: Reasons for visiting the National Board website



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

- *Registration details of practitioners.*
- *Registration requirements.*
- *Detailed information about Medical Board processes in relation to investigations.*

Additional feedback from medical practitioners

Sample of open-ended responses when invited to comment about overall perception of Ahpra and/or the National Board *(full list of responses provided separately)*

There needs to be much more engagement with practitioners about how they can be helpful. I see them more as regulators than as helpful bodies.

I do not know how Ahpra can make considered decisions about medical practice and at the same time make appropriate decisions about Chinese medicine practitioners. I do not understand how the same organisation who is supposed to support evidence based safe care in Australia supports industries like Chinese medicine and chiropractic's. From the public opinion it gives the impression all these industries are as evidence based as western medical care.

Both organisations seem overly bureaucratic, increasing red tape and regulation, but unwilling to investigate serious breaches of patient safety.

Their role as regulators is extremely important for the medical field. But they need to be fair and more transparent. I would like to know more about how they come to some decisions which affect the whole medical field or even individual practitioners. They need not be intimidating to fulfill their role.

I think these organisations work in silos and are sometimes not in touch with the problems faced by practitioners at the coalface. We also are hit with ever increasing fees from these organisations, but they are not at all transparent in what benefits / roles they play for us & how our money is spent. In many ways, they can be seen as monopolies.

Ahpra feels like a punitive organization that readily accepts all manner of unfiltered claims by the public related to medical care, it investigates them and, I believe arrives at the correct determination. My issue with Ahpra is with the way it communicates to the practitioners when these matters arise; it creates stress and does nothing to relieve the anxiety invoked. It appears the practitioner is guilty until proven innocent with no filter against spurious claims. Spurious claims cause significant distress and cost an inordinate amount of precious time.

Currently, impression of Ahpra remains negative and poor. Slow responses only becoming slower. Demanding of information and requirements out of keeping with what is being displayed publicly for access on their website. Rude and rigid staff.

Ahpra needs to be far more responsive to the needs of practitioners being investigated and offer timely, caring, and open communication during the process.

