

Information sheet

Returning to practice or significantly changing scope of practice

Introduction

The Optometry Board of Australia's (the Board) [Registration standard: recency of practice](#) requires optometrists to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. All practitioners must undertake 450 hours of practice in their **regular** scope of practice over the past three years. The Board's [FAQ: Recency of practice](#) provides more information about these requirements.

What do I need to do if I haven't undertaken 450 hours of practice in three years?

If you've taken a break from practice, or practised reduced hours so that you do not meet the minimum requirements of the recency of practice standard, you are required to declare this on your application for registration or renewal of registration.

The Board may decide that practitioners who do not meet the requirements of the recency of practice standard should undertake one or more of the following: a period of supervised practice, successful completion of further training or a competency examination as part of their return to practice plan. Whether you are required to undertake these activities will depend on the Board's assessment of risk to the public.

You will need to provide information to help the Board decide if you are able to continue or return to practice. Further information about this follows below. If you have not practiced for 450 hours in the past three years you should provide the Board with a professional development plan that includes your learning needs analysis and what you will do to make sure that your knowledge and skills remain up-to-date. If your return to practice plan includes supervision you should submit both your professional development and your supervision plan with your [application for registration or re-registration form](#).

What do I need to do if I'm significantly changing my scope of practice?

If you intend to make a significant change to your scope of practice, you must advise the Board and provide a professional development plan/return to practice plan. You need to provide the Board with information about your practice history including your current scope of practice and your intended new scope of practice. You should think about how much your proposed scope of practice differs from your current scope of practice and where the gaps in your knowledge and skills are. The Board's professional development plan will help you to assess these gaps.

The Board will assess the level of risk to the public and decide what activities you should undertake. For example, if you have been working in a management role and are planning to move to a clinical role it is likely that you will need to undertake supervised practice. If you have not worked in a clinical role for a long time you may need to successfully complete further training or a competency examination. You should submit a professional development plan with your application for registration and if you are planning to undertake supervised practice, you should also submit your supervision plan.

What information does the Board need when deciding about my return to practice?

When making a decision about your return to practice the Board takes a number of factors into account. These factors include but are not limited to:

- a. Registration history – where and for how long you have been registered in the past
- b. Practice history – the scope of your previous practice
- c. Length of absence – how long you have been absent from practice
- d. Primary qualification – when you obtained the qualification that entitles you to registration
- e. Additional qualifications – whether you have any additional qualifications relevant to the profession
- f. Proposed practice – the area and circumstances in which you are proposing to practice
- g. Activities related to practice – details of any activities related to practice that you have recently participated in
- h. Professional development – details of any professional development activities that you have recently undertaken

For more details about how to provide this information you should refer to ‘Standard format for curriculum vitae’ at www.ahpra.gov.au/cv.

You should include information/evidence about all the factors that are relevant to your circumstances. You will be asked to include this information with your application form. In some cases, in order to provide the Board with all the relevant information you may need to include some information as additional attachments.

Each submission is considered on a case-by-case basis and the Board may request further information from you or ask you to modify your plan. Depending on your individual circumstances, it may take a few months to complete the process.

The [Applying for registration page](#) on Ahpra’s website provides more information about the registration process. If you have questions you can contact Ahpra by calling 1300 419 495 or submit a [web enquiry](#) on Ahpra’s website.

All documentation should be sent with the relevant application to the Ahpra office in your capital city, as listed on the [Contact us](#) page of the Ahpra website.

What information should I include in a professional development/return to practice plan?

Your return to practice plan should include your understanding of the competencies expected for safe optometry practice, your assessment of your learning needs (the gaps in your knowledge and skills) and your plan for addressing these needs.

Your plan should include information about:

- Learning needs analysis – the knowledge and skills required for the position in which you will be practising and an analysis of any gaps in your current knowledge and skills.
- Professional development activities – professional development, training or programs that you are proposing to undertake to update your knowledge and skills.

The Board has developed template supervised practice and professional development plans to help you set out the relevant information. These plans are located with the supervision guidelines for optometrists on the [Codes, guidelines and policies](#) page of the Board’s website.

What does supervised practice mean?

The Board may decide that you should undertake a period of supervised practice before you are able to hold general registration. They will place a condition on your registration that sets out the level and amount of supervision that you must successfully complete.

The duration of supervised practice and level of supervision required will be determined by a Board risk assessment. A higher level of supervision for a longer duration will be required for those practitioners who have less experience and/or a longer absence from clinical practice.

The Board includes supervision guidelines on its website. You should read these guidelines to help you develop your return to practice plan. The Board has also developed the following template documents to assist with your application:

- *Professional development plan - template*
- *Supervised practice plan – template*
- *Supervision agreement - template*

What information should I include in a supervised practice plan?

The [Optometry Australia entry-level competency standards for optometry](#) will help you to assess the gaps in your knowledge and skills.

You should consider:

- a. your specific learning objectives
- b. activities that you will undertake to address your learning objectives, and
- c. the level and length of supervision required to demonstrate that you are safe to practice.

The Board's template [Professional development plan](#) will help you assess the gaps in your knowledge and skills.

The [Supervision guidelines for optometrists](#) section of the Board's Codes, guidelines and policies page contains information to assist you to develop a supervised practice plan. The Board has developed a [Supervised practice plan template](#) that you can use to help you document your learning objectives, activities and supervision arrangements.

How does the Board decide about supervision?

Generally, the longer you have been absent from practice, the longer the period of supervised practice will be and the higher the level of supervision will be required. For example, if you have been absent from practice for more than three years, but less than four years, and you had previously practised for more than five years, it is possible that you will be required to undertake supervised practice at Level 4 (Remote) for 60 patients.

If you have been absent from practice for more than four years, and less than seven years, and you practised for less than five years you may be required to undertake supervised practice beginning at Level 1 (Direct) and progressing to Level 4 (Remote) while consulting a minimum of 175 patients.

If you have been absent from practice for more than 10 years you will be required to successfully complete further training or a competency examination in addition to undertaking supervised practice commencing at Level 1 (Direct) while consulting a minimum of over 200 patients.

In addition to supervised practice, the Board will often require you to undertake additional continuing professional development (CPD) in the first 12 months of registration.

The above periods of supervised practice are indicative only, and each application is considered on a case-by-case basis.

What happens after I submit my return to practice or supervised practice plan?

The Board will assess all the information that you provide. After assessing your application, the Board may place conditions on your registration requiring you to successfully undertake professional development activities and/or a period of supervised practice.

Depending on how long it is since you last practiced and other identified risk factors, the Board may also require you to successfully complete a program of study or a competency assessment.

After the Board has assessed your application and return to practice plan it may:

- accept your plan
- request that you amend your plan, or
- specify a different plan.