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# 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 Psychology Board of Australia***

Truly<sup>®</sup>  
Deeply



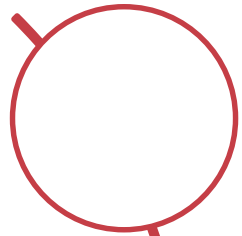
# Introduction

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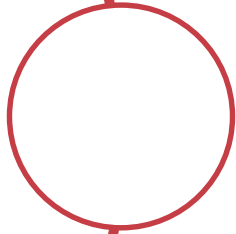
- Truly Deeply was first engaged in 2018 by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) to assess the perception and sentiment towards Ahpra and the National Boards.
- The review was intended to help National Boards and Ahpra better understand what stakeholders think and feel about the 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 Psychology Board of Australia**.

# An overview of the methodology

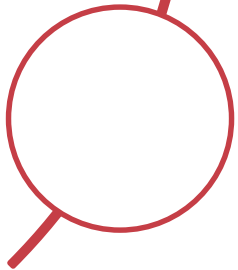
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A **two stage** approach using online surveys has been used.



**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

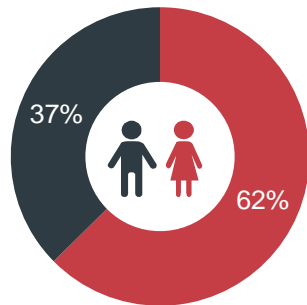
- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community following the qualitative investigation.
- The 2019 questionnaires were very similar to the 2018 questionnaires, with only a small number of additions.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external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

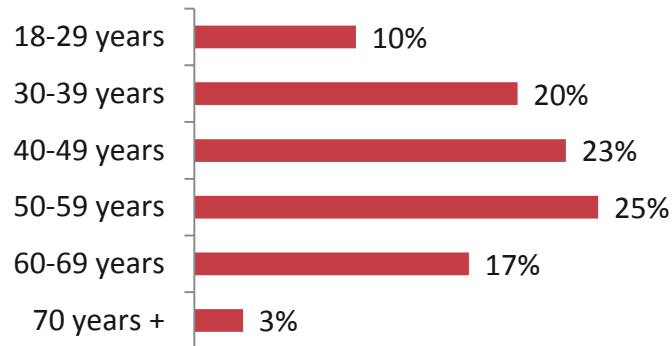


# 2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

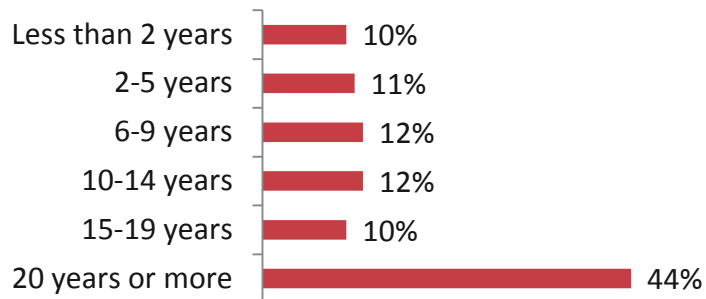
## Gender



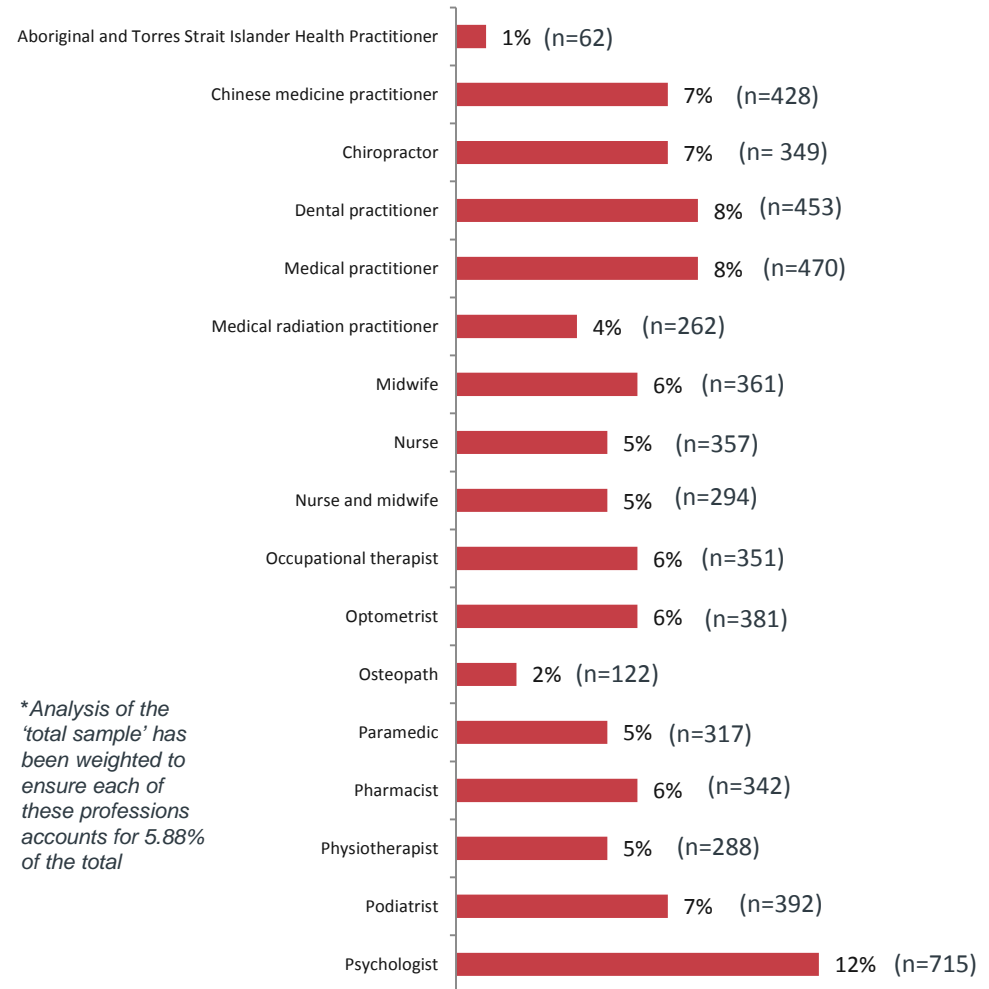
## Age



## Years in practice



## Practitioner type\*

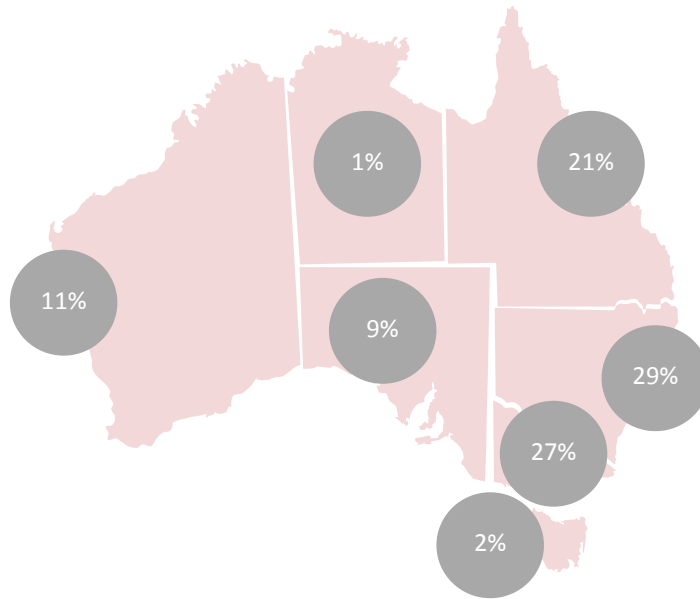


\*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 5.88% of the total

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

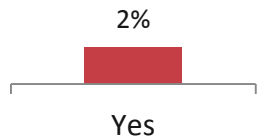
# 2019 sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,944)

## Location

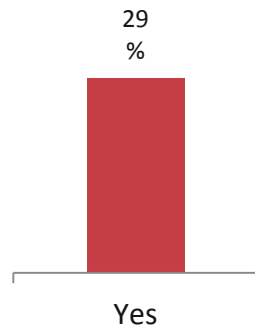


Metro: **64%**  
Regional: **36%**

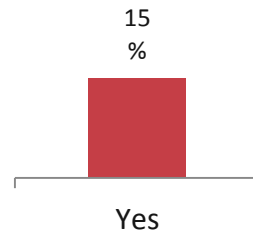
% who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



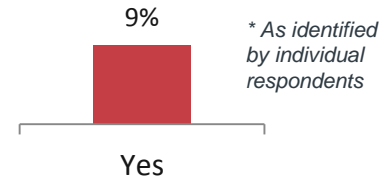
% who were born a country other than Australia



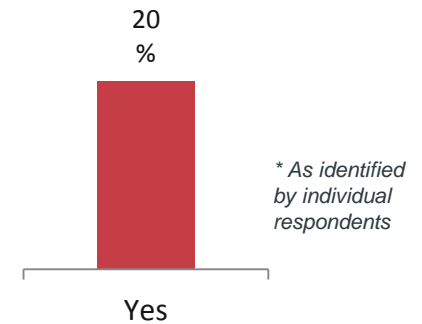
% who speak a language other than English at home



% 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\*



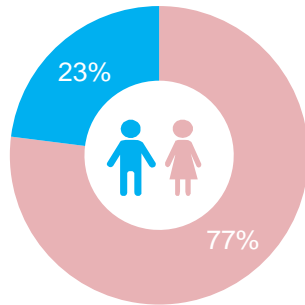
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Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners.

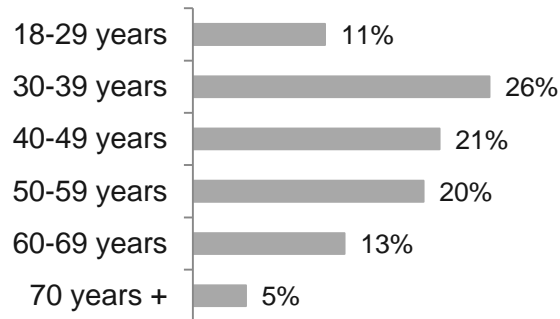
Specific insights into the responses from:  
**Psychologists**

# Sample of psychologists (n=715)

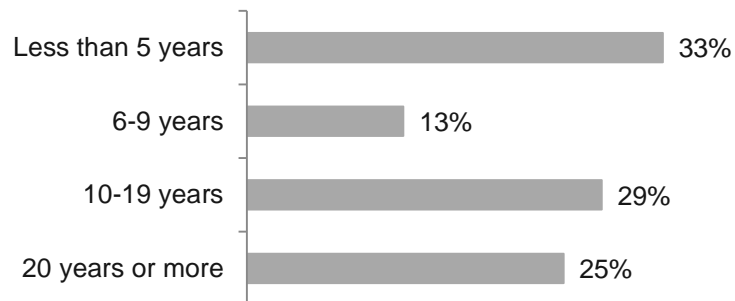
## Gender:



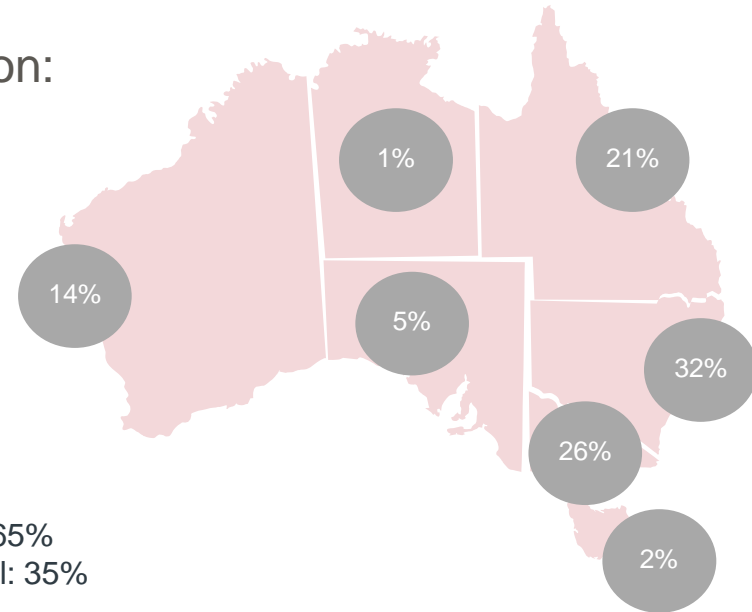
## Age:



## Years in practice:

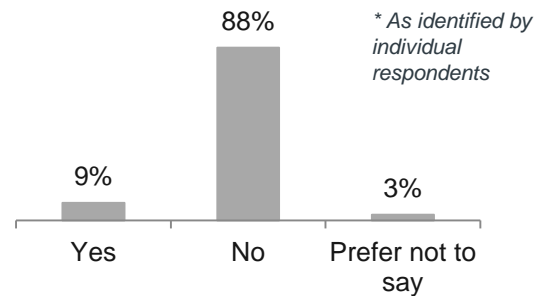


## Location:

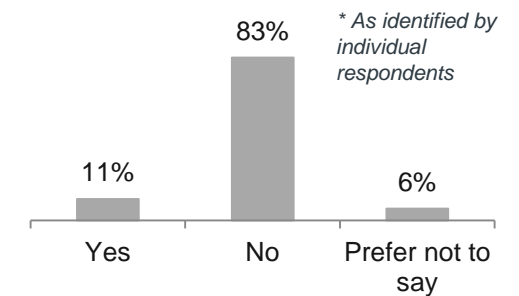


Metro: 65%  
Regional: 35%

% 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 psychology 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=715)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Professional	50%	(+2%)
<b>Empathetic</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>(+27%)</b>
<b>Compassionate</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>(+14%)</b>
Knowledgeable	32%	(+1%)
<b>Competent</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>(+6%)</b>
<b>Responsible</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
<b>Caring</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Committed</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
Trusted	19%	(-3%)
Dedicated	18%	(-3%)

Perceptions in 2019	% of practitioners with that perception	Difference compared to the average across all professions
<b>Hard working</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>(-13%)</b>
<b>Open minded</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>(+8%)</b>
Reputable	13%	(+3%)
<b>Respected</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>(-6%)</b>
<b>Nurturing</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
Approachable	9%	(-2%)
<b>Community minded</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>(-4%)</b>
Honest	7%	(-2%)
<b>Passionate</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>(-7%)</b>
<b>Out of touch</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(+2%)</b>

**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 Psychology 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=715)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
Regulators	44%	(+4%)
<b>Bureaucratic</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>(+16%)</b>
Administrators	36%	(+2%)
Necessary	28%	(-4%)
Decision makers	24%	(-)
<b>Poor communicators</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>(+12%)</b>
<b>Out of touch</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>(+10%)</b>
<b>For practitioners</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>(-10%)</b>
For the public	22%	(-1%)
<b>Rigid</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>(+10%)</b>

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	Difference compared to the average across all professions
<b>Controlling</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>(+5%)</b>
<b>Intimidating</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>(+5%)</b>
<b>Aloof</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>(+7%)</b>
<b>Secretive</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
<b>Competent</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Advocates</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>(-8%)</b>
<b>Antiquated</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
<b>Shows leadership</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Fair</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Supportive</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(-8%)</b>

**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 Psychology 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=787	2019 N=715
Regulators	43%	44%
Bureaucratic	42%	43%
Administrators	36%	36%
<b>Necessary</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Decision makers	28%	24%
Poor communicators	19%	23%
Out of touch	20%	22%
<b>For practitioners</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>22%</b>
For the public	25%	22%
Rigid	23%	20%

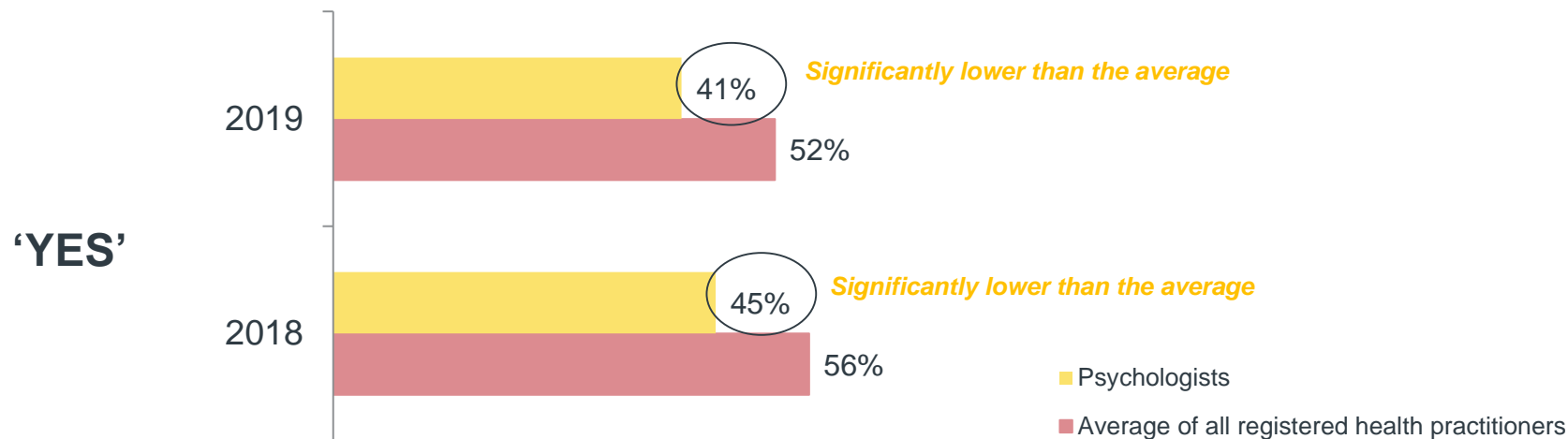
% of practitioners with that perception of the Board	2018 N=787	2019 N=715
Controlling	18%	15%
<b>Intimidating</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Aloof	14%	13%
Secretive	12%	10%
<b>Competent</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Advocates	11%	9%
Antiquated	9%	8%
Shows leadership	9%	8%
Fair	7%	6%
Supportive	5%	5%

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

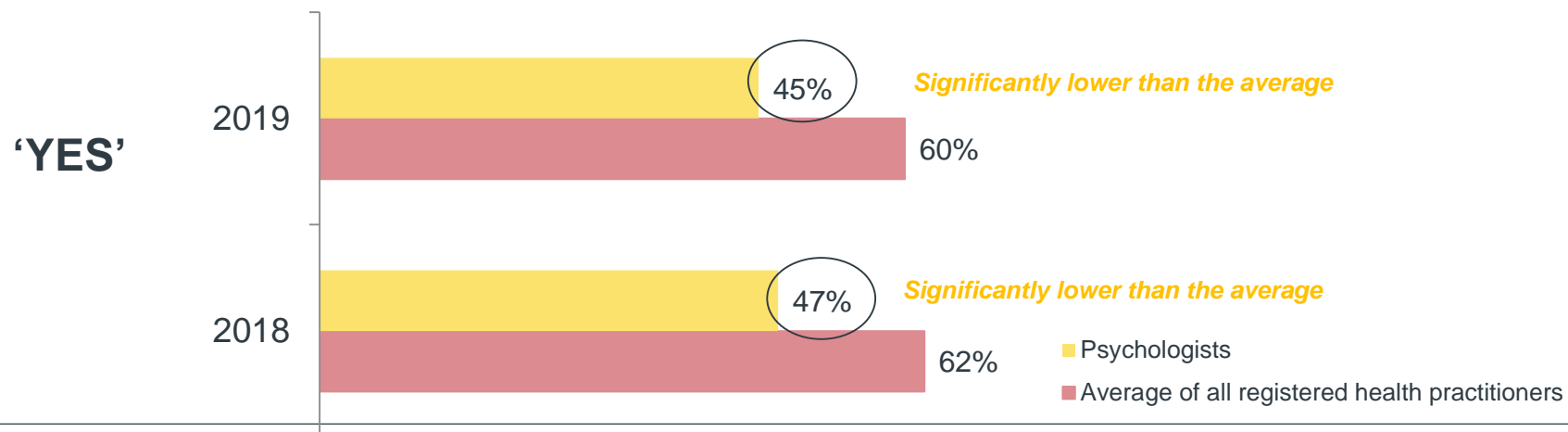
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*, compared with the 2018 result

# Levels of confidence and trust in the Psychology 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 Psychology Board of Australia

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## Indicators of trust: **45% trust the Board**

*I don't have a reason not to.*

*There is not really an alternative, so I have to believe the Board has the best interests of the profession as the prime focus.*

*I trust the Board because I have respect for some of the individual psychologists who I have known to hold positions on the board.*

*Registration standards are appropriate. It's not their fault Ahpra can't carry out basic administrative functions efficiently.*

*They have robust processes in place to regulate psychologists and their practices.*

*They are there to look after the interests of psychologists.*

*They have responsibility for the whole profession, which is a broad group, but enforce the standards required to weed out irresponsible professionals.*

*In touch with critical realities of psychology domains, capabilities, ethics.*

*# Full list of responses provided separately*

## Barriers to trust: **26% DO NOT trust the Board**

*No procedures for maternity leave. Focused on regulation and see no return or support for practitioners.*

*Represents a small section of the overall number of psychologists in Australia. I don't feel that as communicators it is a Board that responsive to all paid up members.*

*I think they have their own agenda. Pushing clinical psychologists, undermining registered psychologists and making their employment more difficult with poorer pay than unregistered social workers. They have done a lot of damage to the profession.*

*Not able to look after the profession, which is divided. While it has attempted to raise the standard of training, it has not been able to mediate the divisions within the psychology profession.*

*Bureaucratic, politically appointed without transparency and accountability. Opinions of panel members are based on rigid, accusatory language - without appropriate knowledge. They can say whatever they wish without explaining their opinions. A totalitarian system, against democracy - cannot really protect the public.*

# 2019: Perceptions of Ahpra among psychologists (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=715)

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
<b>Bureaucratic</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>(+21%)</b>
Regulators	53%	(-1%)
Administrators	49%	(+3%)
<b>Poor communicators</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>(+21%)</b>
Necessary	36%	(-)
<b>For the public</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Rigid</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>(+12%)</b>
<b>Out of touch</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>(+12%)</b>
Decision makers	24%	(+3%)
<b>Intimidating</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>(+5%)</b>

Perception	% of practitioners with that perception of Ahpra	Difference compared to the average across all professions
<b>For practitioners</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>(-7%)</b>
Controlling	17%	(+2%)
<b>Aloof</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>(+8%)</b>
<b>Secretive</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
<b>Competent</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>(-3%)</b>
<b>Antiquated</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>(+4%)</b>
<b>Advocates</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(-4%)</b>
<b>Fair</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(-5%)</b>
<b>Accessible</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>(-6%)</b>

**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 psychologists

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=787	2019 N=715
Bureaucratic	55%	60%
<b>Regulators</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Administrators</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Poor communicators</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Necessary</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>For the public</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Rigid	28%	28%
<b>Out of touch</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>26%</b>
Decision makers	28%	24%
Intimidating	21%	21%

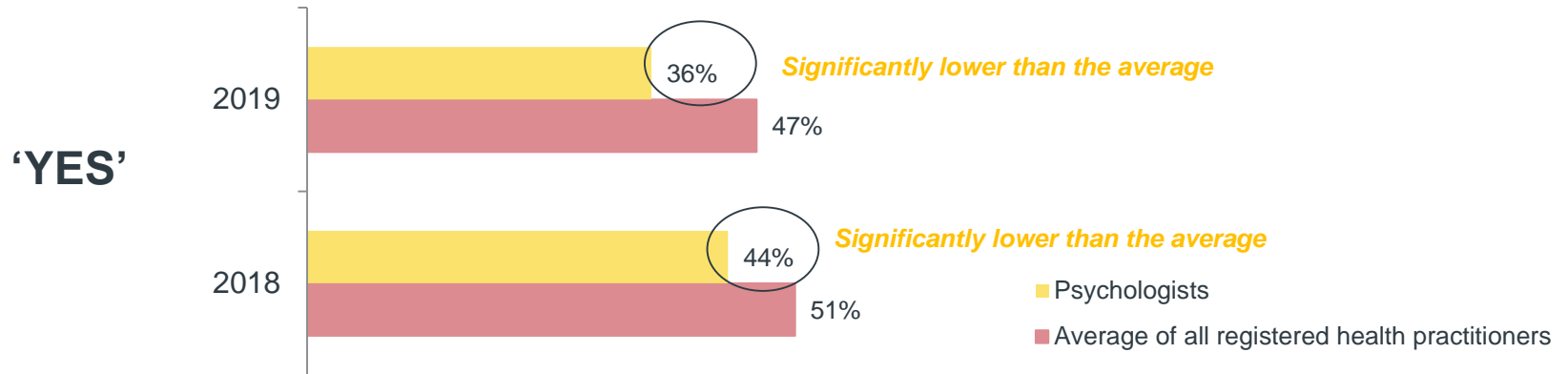
% of practitioners with that perception of the Ahpra	2018 N=787	2019 N=715
For practitioners	21%	20%
Controlling	17%	17%
Aloof	13%	16%
Secretive	10%	12%
<b>Competent</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Antiquated</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Advocates	3%	5%
Fair	7%	5%
Trustworthy	5%	5%
<b>Accessible</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>

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

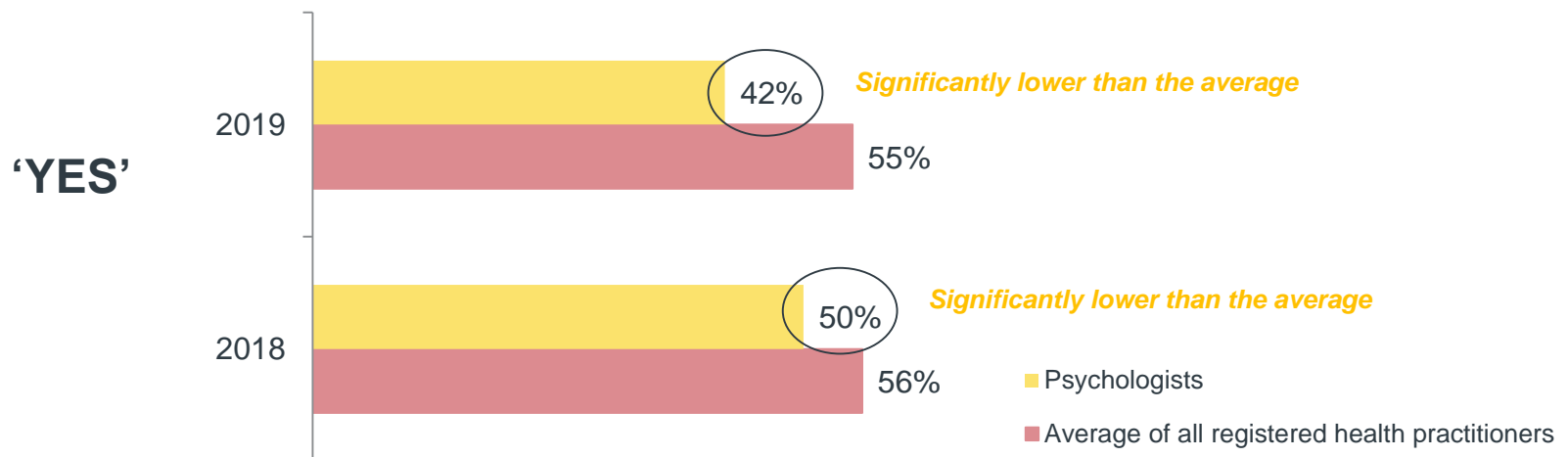
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower in 2019*, compared with the 2018 result

# Levels of confidence and trust in Ahpra among psychologists

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 psychologists

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## Indicators of trust: 42% trust Ahpra

*As a body they regulate my profession fairly; if I comply with regulations ongoing, I am protected by them. I have faith that my experiences with them are fair and I can be transparent with them with any professional issues.*

*The organisation seems to be doing a good job and I have found no reason not to trust Ahpra.*

*They are responsive to complaints about professionals and we need a national body to maintain professional standards.*

*They are doing a good job of protecting both the public and clinicians.*

*I trust Ahpra to support me as a professional by protecting me from practitioners who are unscrupulous (and not registered). I trust that their primary focus is public safety.*

*It seems a fairly professional set-up, responding to complaints when it has to, enforcing CPD etc.*

*I believe Ahpra assists in preserving the integrity of the profession by its strict codes, guidelines and transparency.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

## Barriers to trust: 32% DO NOT trust Ahpra

*Horrendously long processing times that are inexplicably inconsistent (some applications take months while others can take days). Rude service. Overpriced. Inconsistent advice provided. Outdated and inefficient processes. Unclear information provided. I have zero positive things to say about Ahpra.*

*They're not listening to their psychologists and are complicit in the ongoing issues in the field. I would expect Ahpra to be more supportive. Fees are also exorbitant compared to other allied health fields.*

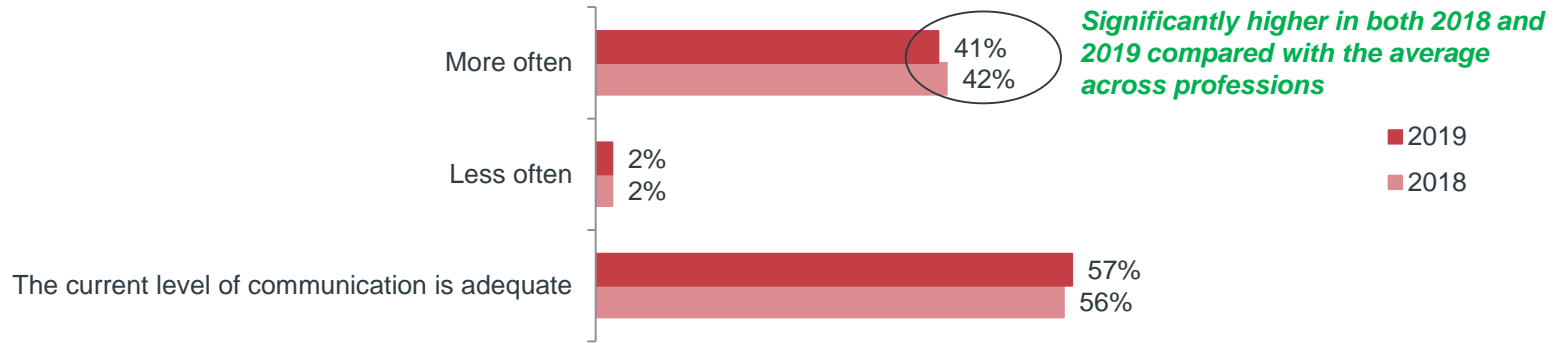
*Mixed really, looking at how slowly things process for registration really makes people in the profession reconsider how efficiently Ahpra would work if there is time pressure. Not good for the public if the professional is questioning the efficiency and competency of them.*

*Because there isn't adequate representation of the immensely varied people that work underneath this banner.*

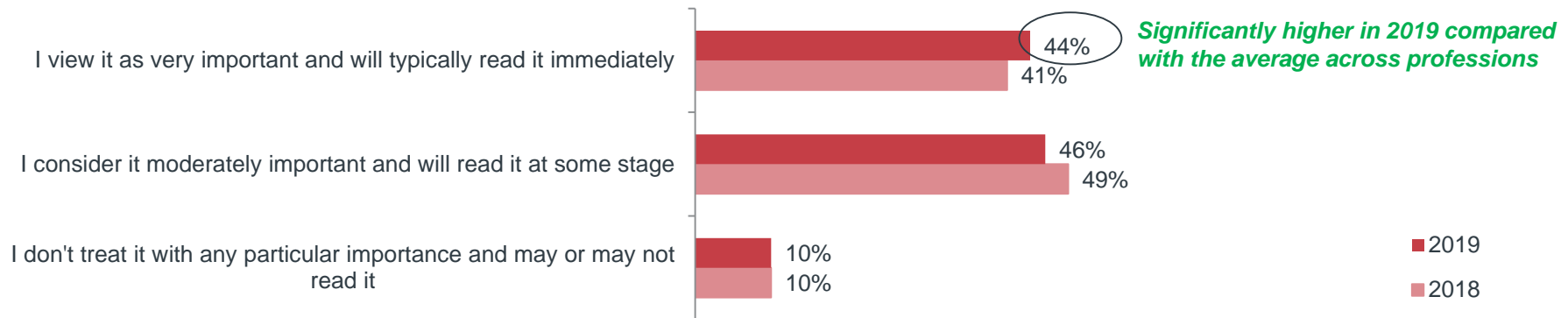
*They give inconsistent responses and are poor at communicating.*

# Response to communication by the Psychology Board of Australia

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



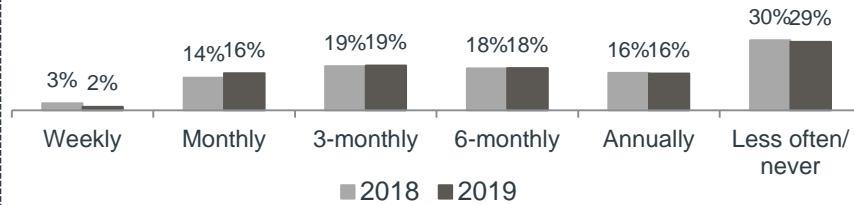
Q. How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board

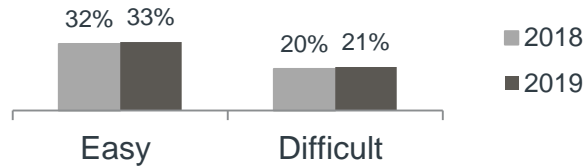
# Use of the Psychology Board of Australia website

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



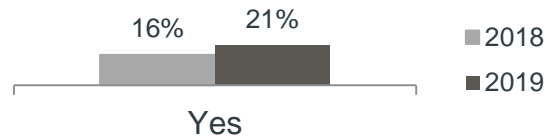
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this board

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



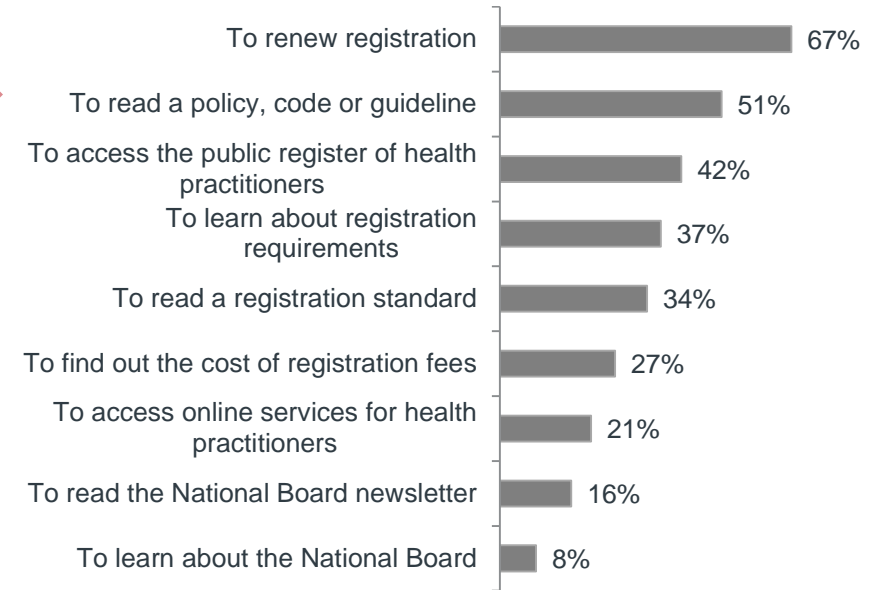
Base: Practitioners who have visited that board's website

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)...

- *Maternity info specific questions around supervision programs.*
- *Response times for submitted applications.*
- *More information about the proposed changes to the AoPE regulations.*
- *Endorsement guidelines for registrars.*
- *Specific information regarding the exact guideline requirements for the registrar programs.*

# Additional feedback from psychologists

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## **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)*

*The waiting times for registrations are extremely long. This year I waited 7 months for confirmation of renewal of my registration, which had implications on my ability to work. More staff should be used for peak times such as the end/start of a year.*

*The perception of Ahpra is that they do not care for health practitioners. They are underfunded, understaffed and appear to be incompetent.*

*The lengthy process and requirements for being an approved supervisor are now very discouraging, especially for psychologist's in private practice who have no organizational support or resources available for this process. Although I very much enjoy supervision and have a lot of experience, I have opted to not offer supervision to trainees for this reason.*

*Ahpra charges a huge amount for its registration fees and we receive nothing in return. Nothing at all. I have no idea what or who the Psychology Board of Australia is nor its role as I have never received anything from them.*

*I am unclear about the differences and overlaps between Ahpra and National Psychology Board. I am also unclear as to why different professions pay different registration fees to Ahpra given it seems all professions receive the same service.*

*Ahpra is very strict regulating psychologists, why not regulating counsellors as well? I see many people from the public going to dodgy counsellors. Most of the public don't understand the difference between psychologists and counsellors besides that they can get a Medicare rebate with one and not the other.*

*I would like to see our National Boards advocate more for the profession in regard to Medicare rebates and standing in the community.*

*Concern about new Medicare items for eating disorders which allow non-psychologists (OTs and social workers) to claim rebates for providing psychological treatment - unsure of Ahpra's position on this.*

*I think it is too easy to complain about a health practitioner with impunity. Ahpra and the Board should have parameters in place to discourage complaints that are borne out of malice and/or otherwise baseless or frivolous.*

*Need to improve your processing times. Delays to approve registration, progress reports and endorsements are excessive and impact on service provision and income for practitioners.*

