

Professions Reference Group communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Wednesday 14 June 2023. The meeting was chaired by Eithne Irving from the Australian Dental Association.

Chief Executive - verbal update

Update on the Kruk Review

Mr Fletcher advised members that the interim report of the independent review of overseas health practitioner regulatory settings, (referred to as the Kruk review) was released on 28 April 2023 to National Cabinet. The final report is due to National Cabinet in August 2023. The interim report contains 56 recommendations which has been accepted by National Cabinet and referred to Health Ministers to advise on implementation of the recommendations, including resourcing and priorities. The independent reviewer has also commenced an additional targeted consultation on implementation of the interim report. Ahpra's submission has been published on its [website](#) for review.

Update on Expert Advisory Group on practitioner distress

Mr Fletcher advised members that work on the recommendations from the Expert Advisory Group have been progressed. The recommendations, Ahpra's response and further information have been published on the website and can be reviewed [here](#).

A publication with a peer journal is being finalised for circulation as there is a lot of interest from professional regulators internationally with common themes and issues. Ahpra are also scoping a stakeholder forum in either September or October 2023. Further detail will be provided to the PRG.

Update on National Law amendments

Mr Fletcher advised members that a set of National Law amendments previously passed by the Queensland Parliament came into effect on 15 May 2023, in all states and territories except Western Australia. There has been particular stakeholder interest around the new power of Ahpra and National Boards to issue public statements where there is serious risk to the public. Ahpra have taken a proactive media approach with the key messages being on public safety and that the power will be used very rarely with a high risk threshold. It is expected that the power will more likely be used regarding unregistered practitioners. The final amendments in the 2022 Bill are expected to start in October 2023. More information is available on our [National Law amendments webpages](#).

Cosmetic surgery reform and the National Law amendment bill on protecting the title surgeon

Mr Fletcher informed members that on 2 June 2023, the Queensland Parliament's [Health and Environment Committee](#) completed its scrutiny process of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023* and has recommended it be passed unamended. Ahpra are now waiting for when the final debate on the amendment bill will be held in Queensland Parliament. At the committee hearing the following issues were raised:

- whether restrictions on the use of the title 'surgeon' should be extended to other health professions, including podiatric surgeons and oral surgeons,
- calls from rural generalists to be added to the surgical classes that will be able to use the title 'surgeon' should the Bill be passed, and
- clarification on the implementation of the area of practice endorsement for cosmetic surgery.

Senate Estimates Appearance

Mr Fletched advised members that he expects Ahpra will be regularly invited to appear at Senate Estimates hearings.

Issues raised at Ahpra's appearance on Thursday 1 June 2023 were:

- the work of Ahpra and the Medical Board of Australia on cosmetic surgery reforms,
- public safety in the area of sexual misconduct by registered practitioners,
- our COVID-19 vaccine position statement,
- our performance in managing notifications, and
- the distress and harm of practitioners when subject to a regulatory process.

The next hearing of Senate Estimates is expected later in 2023.

Regulatory Operations update

Registration renewal

Members noted that the NMBA renewal campaign is wrapping up and is the largest campaign with over 470,000 individuals who will seek registration renewal within that period. As at the end of May there were 96% of applications that have been received and a rate of 1.5% of nurses and midwives electing not to renew. The medical renewal campaign will start in late July and early August. The readiness for the medical renewal campaign is well advanced and is expected to be the first to experience for our new operating platform.

Ahpra has continued its work on engagement and support for registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait practitioners from all professions through the renewal campaigns. Further work has also included reaching out to all new graduates in navigating the process and making sure it is culturally safe. This has included tailored support for new Aboriginal and Torres Strait graduates in the NMBA registration campaign and making the process seamless for them to complete.

Notifications update

Members noted that there was a slight decrease in notifications received this financial year compared to the previous. The lower volumes have been beneficial in assisting the team to manage notification timeframes, which have been improving. Over the past 6 months, matters open for longer than 12 months have been in decline.

Transformation Program update – standing agenda item

The work that is currently being undertaken is for the release of the new regulatory IT system and is anticipated to go live at the end of July 2023. This work is on the contingency, preparedness and planning in the regulatory operations team across all departments to support the continuity of business processes. Integration testing is being commenced to ensure there is connection between the new system and the public facing system, including the public register and the practitioner information exchange (PIE) where we supply employers and other government departments with updated practitioner registration information.

Members noted that the look of the new system will be a little different, there will be more closely aligned forms used across all the professions including similar language and questions. The improvements will be noticed on the back end in the regulatory operations directorate and will speed up the processes making administrative tasks simpler.

Members noted the positive impacts of the system which will include the process for international applicants who will be moving to a single digital application form and the way that proof of identity is undertaken and will no longer require a person to establish identity.

National Board position statements on Covid vaccinations

Members noted an update regarding the National Board position statements published on 9 March 2021. Ahpra are about to commence targeted consultation in the coming weeks. It was noted that the current statement had not introduced new scope requirements beyond the current code of conduct for each of the professions who are registered in the National Scheme. Given changes to the public health guidance regarding the pandemic, it is timely to review the position statement.

Eithne Irving

Acting Chair
Professions Reference Group