



Professions Reference Group communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Wednesday 13 September 2023.

Chief Executive - verbal update

Surgeons Amendment Bill

On 20 April 2023, the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill was introduced into the Queensland Parliament and was referred to the Parliament's Health and Environment Committee for scrutiny. The Medical Board Acting Chair and Ahpra CEO appeared before the Parliamentary Committee in late May 2023 and reiterated Ahpra and the Board's support for the Amendment Bill.

On 2 June 2023 the Committee published its report and recommended that the Bill be passed. Once passed, the amendments in the Bill will mean only those with specialist registration in surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology or ophthalmology will be able to legally call themselves a 'surgeon'.

On 12 September 2023, the Bill passed Queensland Legislative Assembly with bi-partisan support. Ahpra and the Medical Board are releasing communications and FAQs to accompany passage of the Bill.

Media coverage on non-surgical cosmetic procedures

A media strategy to mark the one-year anniversary of the Cosmetic Surgery Review and announce our widening focus on non-surgical cosmetic procedures was recently launched.

We have undertaken one of the most successful media campaigns in Ahpra and the National Boards' history, with highly strategic releases on two fronts that aimed to reshape the national narrative on cosmetic regulation. The approach was an unprecedented success, generating more than 1000 media clips in the first 24 hours following the release's issue alone. The clips were overwhelmingly positive towards both our action on cosmetic procedures as well as the work completed on surgery reforms. Importantly, the positive headlines were spread across all major channels and mediums, dominating media coverage across the country.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) intend to develop nursing-specific practice guidelines, building on their Position statement on nurses and cosmetic medical procedures. The NMBA's practice guidelines will be similar to the other National Boards' guidelines for practitioners who perform non-surgical cosmetic procedures, and consultation on all the guidelines is planned to occur at the same time.

Independent Review of Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings (Kruk Review)

The Independent Reviewer (Ms Robyn Kruk AO) has now provided her final report to government in August, and Ms Kruk has completed her appointment. National Cabinet is now expected to consider the report and its recommendations in November 2023. The Health Chief Executives Forum has tasked the National Health Workforce Taskforce (comprising representatives from each jurisdiction) to develop a comprehensive implementation plan for implementing agreed actions arising from National Cabinet. We have continued to inform jurisdictions and the National Health Workforce Taskforce of the need for funding to support our implementation work.

Ministerial Policy Direction 2023-1: Medical college accreditation of training sites

On 23 July 2023, Health Ministers resolved to issue a policy direction to clarify Ministerial Council expectations of the Australian Medical Council and medical colleges regarding accreditation of training

sites and to direct Ahpra and the Medical Board to note these expectations when exercising their functions for the purposes of the National Law.

The policy direction is available on the Ahpra website [here](#).

Criminal History registration standard initial consultation

In August, work has focused on the Criminal History registration standard initial consultation, which commenced with jurisdictions on 1 August and with [public consultation launching](#) on 3 August 2023. The review of the Criminal history registration standard (the criminal history standard) is a key project under the [blueprint of work to improve public safety in health care regulation](#). Given the context of the work, we are taking a different approach to the standard consultation process and moving to an initial public consultation to test the scope and expectations of the review with jurisdictions and other critical stakeholders.

This initial consultation will provide valuable information on expectations and attitudes regarding criminal history issues, to inform developing a revised draft criminal history standard for further consultation. We are also taking an opportunity to test stakeholder views about other key issues in the blueprint work.

Regulatory intelligence

An independent review of the research and evaluation function has recommended the creation of a regulatory intelligence function to support Ahpra and the Boards to predict and proactively respond to risk that could impact public safety.

Members will be provided with an opportunity to provide their input into any 'disruptors' they are experiencing in their profession which will inform our regulatory insight. The Secretariat will agenda this as a standing item at each meeting going forward. It was noted immediately that AI is a significant disruptor but also can be harnessed as an invaluable tool.

Regulatory Operations update

The nursing and midwifery renewal registration campaign is nearing completion and the medical renewal registration campaign will commence shortly. Both renewal campaigns are being managed under our existing systems as we are not ready to transition to the new system. The upcoming graduate campaign and the renewal of all other professions this year will also be managed on the existing system.

The graduate registration team have been on-boarded and are completing their training. They will be prepared to take on the influx of graduate registrations which are due shortly.

There has been as a slight reduction in notifications received in 2022-23 as compared to the same time in the previous year. There has also been a significant improvement in closures of notifications within three months of receipt and aged notifications (over 12 months).

National restrictions library

The National restrictions library (NRL) provides a consolidated structure for commonly imposed restrictions. It was first published in 2015. The NRL is used by Ahpra staff across all the regulatory functions to assist in formulating consistent recommendations for restrictions when advising committees of the National Boards. Co-regulators and tribunals use restrictions that are identical or similar to the NRL.

Since the NRL was first published, we have initiated a project to update the NRL to ensure:

- each restriction is expressed in plain English while continuing to meet the 'good restriction test'
- each restriction remains fit for purpose, and
- all commonly used restrictions are available.

As part of Ahpra's transformation program the NRL will be integrated into the new system. This provides opportunities for streamlining registration, notification and compliance processes. We are intending to update restrictions in the current NRL prior to integration into the system.

Transformation Program update

Business Transformation Program is a time limited (4-5 year) project, and we are in the final stages of building our business processes for the Salesforce platform. We are moving to a genuine online

registration application process which is what professions have been looking for. We are expecting to go live in the new calendar year.

Consumer health complaints – Practitioner checklist and consumer resources

Ahpra is in the final stages of its joint project with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) to improve the consumer complaints experience in our respective areas of work, working closely with the Consumer Health Complaints Reference Group. The project is now focusing on developing resources for consumers and practitioners to address gaps identified earlier in the project which investigated the consumer and health provider complaints experience.

There has been further development of the checklist, which Ahpra, National Boards and the Commission are working towards publishing as a jointly branded resource in early October. An overview of the planned publication approach and proposed key messages for practitioners are provided for any feedback from members.

The next meeting of the PRG is confirmed for 8 November 2023.

Julianne Bryce

Chair

Professions Reference Group