

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met at the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) National office in Melbourne on Thursday 28 November 2019.

The meeting was chaired by Julie Reeves from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF).

Ahpra update

Ahpra CEO, Martin Fletcher, updated members on various matters, including the following.

- Ahpra and the Medical Board of Australia have commissioned Professor Ron Patterson to undertake a follow up review of the implementation of recommendations, predominantly in medical, three years after he delivered his chaperone review report.
- Ahpra has commissioned the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner (NHPOPC) Ms Richelle McCausland to review confidentiality of the notifier and how we ensure it is safe for notifiers to report.
- Key items discussed in the Aged Care Royal Commission included experiences of professions new to statutory regulation and discussion of the need for registration of the aged care workforce.
- A [fact sheet](#) on tribunal and court decisions on the national register of practitioners has recently been published on the Ahpra website under [Publishing links to tribunal and court decisions](#) and Professor Paterson will speak to concerned stakeholders about this part of his review.
- Ahpra and the National Boards have released results from a social research project done last year to better understand what the community, regulated health professions, and stakeholders think and feel, particularly in areas of understanding, confidence and trust. A regular pulse check on trust and sentiment is planned for future work.

Regulatory operations update

Ahpra Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough provided an update to members.

- Impacts of operational model change are now evident in the way current applications and renewals have been addressed. Work streams are generally on track and showing efficiencies as getting the right workforce and systems in place help deliver expected outcomes within target. Improving the balance between resources and processes to get work flowing on a sustainable basis continues.
- In terms of resources, staffing has been increased to clear backlogs, ease the early lodgement of applications in the peak period with graduate applications and renewals while further improvement is focused on communications, streamlining the assessment process, better workload/workforce forecasting and reporting.
- There was an active discussion on the data presented which covered the volume of applications and targets including issues that cause delays and how these are being addressed. Members expressed their interest to support communications to help applicants provide complete applications.

Mandatory notifications update

Ahpra National Director, Engagement and Government Relations Nick Lord shared information with members on the progress of preparation for changes to mandatory notification requirements.

- The public consultation on the proposed revision to the National Board mandatory guidelines has been completed and it is tentatively expected to come into effect around March 2020.
- The release of the awareness campaign materials, which will be shared with the PRG on the week of 2 December 2019, aims to encourage practitioners to seek help when they need to, and explain the

new obligations particularly for treating practitioners. Mr Lord encouraged members to use the resources including social media and explaining materials and invited them to continue to talk with Ahpra about this.

- Next steps will include finalising the revised national guidelines from early 2020 including a second round of the information campaign.

Consultation on amendments to the National Law

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Principal Policy Adviser, Legislative Reform Nick Fischer together with colleagues Michelle Calalesina and Michelle Harris (Policy Officers, Workforce Regulatory Reform) discussed the following with members.

- Mr Fischer gave a brief summary of the Tranche 2 legislative reforms that have been agreed by Health Ministers, noting the objective of the reforms are to:
 - improve the protection of the public
 - promote better cooperation and information sharing, and
 - improve regulatory administration and efficiency.
- Mr Fischer also discussed the two new proposals, which have been approved in-principle by Ministers, that are currently open for targeted consultation. Feedback from stakeholders will be reported back to COAG Health Council.

Consultation on draft guidelines for registered practitioners and students in relation to blood-borne viruses

Ahpra Executive Director, Medical Board of Australia Joanne Katsoris updated members.

- The Dental, Medical, Nursing and Midwifery, Paramedicine and Podiatry Boards of Australia recently consulted on the draft Guidelines for registered health practitioners and students in relation to blood-borne viruses (BBV). The draft guidelines require health practitioners and students who perform exposure prone procedures to comply with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia Australian national guidelines for the management of healthcare workers living with blood borne viruses and healthcare workers who perform exposure prone procedures at risk of exposure to blood borne viruses (the CDNA guidelines). Members help is sought around publicising the changes, particularly to provide information about what exposure prone procedures are.

Other business

- Australian Chiropractors Association's CEO Mr Matthew Fisher offered to provide an update to members on the agenda item Options for a nationally consistent approach to the regulation of spinal manipulation on children after the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) has published its statement.
- Ms Reeves informed members that her term as Chair and her role in the PRG comes to a close after this meeting and thanked members for their ongoing contribution to the PRG meetings. Julianne Bryce will be the ongoing ANMF representative on the PRG.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the PRG will be on 26 March 2020.

Julie Reeves

Chair
Professions Reference Group