
Message from the Chair

Welcome to the second edition of the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia's (the National Board) newsletter.

Since our profession's transition into the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) on 1 July 2012, we have undertaken detailed strategic work and business planning to ensure delivery of the Board's functions under the National Law.¹ This includes establishing committees to exercise delegated functions and to ensure good governance and accountability for the Board's activities.

The Board's Registration and Notifications Committee (RNC) is an example of such ongoing work. The RNC has held 26 meetings during 2012/13 to assess and decide complex registration applications and to consider notifications about occupational therapists. This work by Board members and AHPRA staff has resulted in over 15,000 occupational therapists being successfully registered within the National Scheme.

As registration and notification processes are being standardised, it is important for practitioners to maintain their understanding of the Board's registration standards, codes and guidelines. This newsletter provides guidance about practitioner obligations under the National Law for meeting standards and complying with guidelines. There is also an article on the Board's *Recency of practice registration standard*, which may have implications for some practitioners renewing their registration on 30 November 2013.

Fee reduction

A benefit of completing one year within the National Scheme has been the opportunity to consider more reliable data to build better forecasts for the cost of national regulation. As a result, a fee reduction of \$50 for general registration and renewal, with lower fees across the Board's other registration types, has recently been announced. These planning and forecast exercises have been coupled with the additional experience and efficiencies gained over the past 12 months, and the fact that there are more occupational therapists in the previously unregistered jurisdictions than estimated.

The Board has been able to reduce fees while ensuring that it retains adequate financial reserves to allow it to fulfil its regulatory function. The Board will continue to keep fees under close review.

Dr Mary Russell

Occupational Therapist
Chair, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia

Practitioner obligations under the National Law: meeting standards and complying with guidelines

As a registered occupational therapist, it is important that you are familiar with and understand the national registration standards, codes and guidelines that apply to your practice. Ensuring that only practitioners who meet these standards are registered is how the National Board protects the public.

All the standards are published under the [Registration standards](#) tab on the Board's website, and the codes and guidelines are published under the [Codes and guidelines](#) tab.

In addition, the Board has developed and published a series of fact sheets to assist practitioners. You can find these under the [Codes and guidelines > fact sheets](#) tab on the website. Current fact sheets include advice on:

- English language skills for overseas qualified practitioners
- when occupational therapists should be registered
- continuing professional development (CPD)
- protected titles and specialist registration, and
- recency of practice.

Recency of practice

The Board has developed its *Recency of practice registration standard* to establish the requirements in relation to the nature, extent, period and recency of any previous practice of the profession by applicants for registration.

¹ The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

The standard specifies that all registered occupational therapists are required to maintain their competence to practise. The Board requires that in order to maintain or renew their registration, applicants must have practised for a minimum of six months' full-time equivalent during the five years preceding the start of the registration period.

Why is there a recency of practice requirement?

The powers and functions of the National Boards are defined by the National Law. The fundamental principle underpinning registration is the protection of the public. By regulating practice, each National Board works to ensure practitioners are suitably trained and competent.

The Board recognises that many occupational therapists take extended breaks from practice, for various reasons including parenting and other responsibilities. In developing its *Recency of practice registration standard* the Board ensures that practitioners have a clear and accessible pathway to return to practice, but in a way that certifies currency and competence as well as ensuring public safety. The re-entry pathway includes completing CPD and supervised practice.

The standard warrants that members of the public have access to practitioners with up-to-date skills and experience and is an important component of the national regulatory framework.

What is the process for assessment?

The Board's assessment of applications and renewals that do not meet the recency of practice requirement will take into account the following:

- a) the practitioner's registration history
- b) the period of absence from the profession
- c) activities related to the practice of occupational therapy undertaken in the previous five years
- d) history of CPD completed, and
- e) any additional study undertaken or qualifications obtained during the period of absence from practice.

The Board considers practitioners' circumstances on a case-by-case basis, while upholding both the requirements of the National Law and the intent of the Board's registration standard.

If your application does not meet the recency of practice requirement we recommend that you provide further information to the Board for consideration, using the

template provided in the [*Codes and guidelines>fact sheets*](#) section of the Board's website.

Where can I find more information?

You can find the *Recency of practice registration standard* under the [*Registration standards*](#) tab on the Board's website. Further clarification is provided in the *Recency of practice fact sheet* under [*Codes and guidelines>Fact sheets*](#).

Should you have further questions we invite you to contact AHPRA on 1300 419 495 or log an enquiry via AHPRA's website www.ahpra.gov.au.

Practitioner forums

To discuss regulation and encourage the integration of registration standards, codes and guidelines into daily practice, members of the National Board have been engaging with the profession at interstate practitioner breakfast forums held so far this year in Brisbane (March), Perth (May) and Adelaide (July).

These successful early morning forums have been designed to assist practitioners before their busy work day and have preceded the Board's monthly meeting to streamline costs and schedules. As well as members of the National Board, senior AHPRA staff have been involved whenever possible to discuss the National Scheme and to help answer any questions.

The forums have been a good opportunity to give advice on the registration standards and the important information contained within the Board's guidelines (see the [Board website](#) for these resources). We have also been able to respond to practitioners' questions and concerns.

In addition to the practitioner breakfast forums, Board members attended the recent Occupational Therapy Australia national conference held in Adelaide (July). The National Board Chair (Dr Mary Russell) was pleased to join a discussion with the CEO of Occupational Therapy Australia (Ms Rachel Norris) and conference participants to discuss scope of practice. The breakfast meeting explored the Association's work on this front, and the Board's perspective on the regulatory considerations for any approach.

Board members extend their thanks to practitioners who have participated in these sessions. The Board would also like to thank Occupational Therapy Australia for enabling the recent Adelaide event to precede the conference.



Practitioner breakfast forum in Perth. Over 100 people took part, with seven sites requesting videoconferencing (Kalgoorlie, Northam, North Metro, West Perth, Geraldton, Mandurah, Clarkson).



International regulatory engagement

New Zealand

Members of the National Board held their first co-Boards' meeting with their New Zealand counterparts, the Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand (OTBNZ) in June, in Sydney.

Topics of mutual interest discussed included competencies, overseas trained practitioners, assessment tools, supervisor training, accreditation, the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement (TTMRA) and the different regulatory frameworks in our two countries.

International program – CLEAR congress

The third international congress on professional and occupational regulation was held in Edinburgh, Scotland by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR) on June 27-28. Representatives from AHPRA, National Board Chairs (Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy) and the OTBNZ were in attendance. The congress provided a rare chance to meet with North American, European and UK counterparts. Important issues regarding competency, global mobility, regulatory risk and learning were discussed, with ideas arising for the National Scheme as a result.

In addition, valuable meetings were held with the Health and Care Professions Council (London) to explore items of shared interest including approaches to performance and conduct matters, program accreditation and resource building for clinical/professional advice.

REMINDER: 2013 renewal due soon

Occupational therapists across Australia are reminded that their registration is due for renewal **by 30 November 2013**.

Please make sure you provide up-to-date email contact details to AHPRA so you don't miss the reminders to renew.

Make sure you renew your registration on time. The quickest and easiest way to do this is [online](#) (90 per cent of occupational therapists used this secure service last year).

Occupational therapists in Queensland and Western Australia who renewed their registration by 30 June 2013 have been registered to practise until 30 November 2013 and must renew again. All occupational therapists working in Australia will then be aligned to the national renewal date for the profession.

Look out for your reminders to renew from AHPRA about six to eight weeks before annual renewal is due. They are confirmation that online renewal is open. If you do not want to renew your registration to keep practising you can simply ignore the reminders from AHPRA or go online to 'opt out' of renewing. Using the 'opt out' service puts a stop to renewal reminders.

Renewal applications received by AHPRA **after** 30 November will incur an additional late fee. If you haven't renewed by one month after 30 November 2013, your registration will lapse. This means you must apply again for registration and will **not be able to practise** occupational therapy until your registration application has been finalised.

FAQ about renewal can be found on the Board's website under [Codes and guidelines](#).

Graduate applications

AHPRA will call for online applications later this year from graduates who are in their final year of an approved program of study.

Occupational therapy students who will be completing studies at the end of 2013 are urged to apply for registration four to six weeks before completing their course. An email reminder to apply early and online will be sent by AHPRA on behalf of the Board to individuals on the Student Register.

Applications can also be made by completing a paper application form. All applications, online or in hard copy, require students to post some supporting documents to AHPRA. Occupational therapy students are encouraged to read the information on AHPRA's website under Graduate applications.

Graduates must meet the Board's registration requirements and need to be a registered health practitioner before they can start practising. New graduates are registered and eligible to start working as soon as their name is published on the national register of practitioners.

Consultations

The National Board recently participated in a cross-Board consultation on common guidelines and the shared *Code of conduct*. Submissions closed on 30 May 2013 and will be published soon.

The consultation paper included:

- revisions to the *Guidelines for advertising* (common to all National Boards)
- a *Social media policy* (common to all National Boards), and
- revisions to the *Guidelines for mandatory notifications* (common to all National Boards).

To access the consultation papers, please visit the Past consultations page on the Board's website.



Snapshot of the profession

The National Board's latest quarterly data update shows there are 15,173 registered occupational therapists in Australia. This is an increase of 918

practitioners since December 2012 (the data published in our March newsletter).

For further details on Australia's occupational therapy workforce, visit the About us>Statistics page on the Board's website.

Occupational therapy practitioners: state and territory by registration type (June 2012)

State	General	Limited		Non-practising	Provisional	Total	% By State
		Postgraduate training or supervised practice	Teaching or research				
ACT	227	2		1		230	1.52%
NSW	4,158	62		52	20	4,292	28.29%
NT	135			1		136	0.9%
QLD	2,992	10	2	50	3	3,057	20.15%
SA	1,129	4		61	4	1,198	7.9%
TAS	243	8		2		253	1.67%
VIC	3,562	33		40	8	3,643	24.01%
WA	2,148	21		50	2	2,221	14.64%
Not Stated	132			11		143	0.94%
Total	14,726	140	2	268	37	15,173	

Other news

Audit of compliance with registration standards

All registered practitioners are required to comply with the National Board's registration standards. The registration standards are published on the National Board websites under *Registration standards*.

AHPRA is fine-tuning a process and tools to audit practitioner compliance with mandatory registration standards on behalf of National Boards. Each time a practitioner applies to renew their registration they must make a declaration that they have met the registration standards for their profession.

Practitioner audits are an important part of the way that National Boards and AHPRA can better protect the public by regularly checking these declarations for a random sample of practitioners. Audits help to make sure that practitioners are meeting the standards and provide important assurance to the community and the Boards.

AHPRA is working closely with all National Boards to make sure practitioners are prepared, informed and supported. We will also be working and consulting with unions, professional associations and large employers as we make random audit routine in the National Scheme.

We will keep stakeholders up to date with detailed information on the [Audit page on the AHPRA website](#).

Notifications guides published

In June, AHPRA published new guides for health practitioners and the community about how notifications are managed in the National Scheme. The [guide for practitioners](#) and a series of fact sheets explain to practitioners what happens when AHPRA receives a notification on behalf of a National Board. The information complements the direct correspondence that individuals receive if a notification is made about them.

The practitioners' guide clearly explains what happens after a concern has been raised about a health practitioner, who decides what happens, how AHPRA works with health complaints entities (on behalf of the Board) and what practitioners can expect from those processes.

AHPRA has also developed a guide for the community about making a notification about a health practitioner. This guide for notifiers, [Do you have a concern about a health practitioner? A guide for people raising a concern](#), will be an early focus for feedback from the newly established Community Reference Group for AHPRA and the National Boards.

Both guides are published online on the AHPRA and National Boards' websites in a wholly revised section on [complaints and notifications](#).

Community Reference Group

AHPRA has established a Community Reference Group, which had its first meeting in June 2013, to work with AHPRA and the National Boards. This is the first time a national group of this kind, with a focus on health practitioner regulation, has been established in Australia.

The group has a number of roles, including providing feedback, information and advice on strategies for building better knowledge in the community about health practitioner regulation, but also advising AHPRA on how to better understand, and most importantly, meet, community needs. Members are listed on the [Community Reference Group Members page](#) and communiqués from the group's meetings are published on the [Communiqués page](#) after each of its meetings.

Professions Reference Group

The Professions Reference Group was set up in 2012. It is made up of representatives of the professional associations for the professions included in the National Scheme, including occupational therapy, with participation from AHPRA's CEO and senior staff. Quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for AHPRA to brief the professions about its work and for the professions to ask questions about emerging issues relevant to regulation. The group also provides expert advice to AHPRA in developing a range of information for practitioners, such as the recently published notifications guide and fact sheets.

By working with the group, AHPRA has also been able to establish a practitioner consultative group, made up of individual practitioners nominated by their professional association who are willing to provide feedback on proposals and systems improvements, to inform change and improve services ahead of large-scale implementation.

Keep in touch with the Board

Make sure you keep your contact details with AHPRA current to receive important updates from the National Board, such as registration renewal reminders.

The National Board's website is the most up-to-date and reliable source of information on everything relating to the regulation of occupational therapy practice in Australia: www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au.

The Occupational Therapy Board of Australia and AHPRA can be contacted by phone on 1300 419 495. An online enquiry form is available on both websites under the [Contact us](#) link.

Mail correspondence can be addressed to: Dr Mary Russell, Chair, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, GPO Box 9958, Melbourne VIC 3001.