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Message from the Chair

The last six months have been productive for the Board, with some significant progress made on its key projects for the year.

The Board's project to develop a revised set of competency standards for the occupational therapy profession is currently in the consultation phase. We are working with stakeholders to refine and develop the first draft of the standards to ensure they reflect the breadth of occupational therapy practice. The Board looks forward to continuing to work with you over the coming months, as we begin public consultation on the revised standards.

The Board's review of the profession-specific registration standards for continuing professional development (CPD), recency of practice (ROP) and professional indemnity insurance (PII) is also in the consultation phase. We are analysing the feedback received during preliminary consultation and development revisions to the draft standards, done prior to public consultation. Again we would welcome your feedback once we begin public consultation.

In addition to this work on major projects, the Board has also begun holding a series of informative and productive forums with education providers around the country to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. The Board hopes to continue these forums in the New Year.

Ms Julie Brayshaw
**Chair, Occupational Therapy
Board of Australia**



Competency standards development project

The development of a revised set of competency standards for the profession has been progressing well. Preliminary consultation on the revised standards resulted in some very informative and considered feedback, and the Board has been working to refine the standards in light of that feedback. The Board is keen to ensure that the revised standards are reflective of the breadth of occupational therapy practice and can be specifically applied in the occupational therapy practice context.

The Board is committed to wide-ranging stakeholder engagement on the revised competencies, and as part of the public consultation process will be adopting a number of mediums in which to consult with stakeholders. A series of webinars will also be conducted in the New Year, and an online survey will be posted on the Board's website to enable further feedback to be provided.

Focus group sessions are planned in each Australian state and territory capital, as well as in identified rural and remote locations around the country. A schedule for the remaining focus groups is being finalised, and will be published on the Board's website.

If you are interested in participating in other aspects of the public consultation on the revised draft competency standards, please email otboardconsultation@ahpra.gov.au. Your details will be recorded and we will be in touch once further details of the consultation process have been finalised.

Return to practice pathways project

In May, the Board approved a project to examine pathways for re-entry into the profession by individuals who have previously been registered as an occupational therapist but who have taken a break from practice. The Board has received anecdotal feedback

from the profession about the difficulties that people experience in undertaking supervised practice, which is the Board's current pathway for facilitating a practitioner's return to practice.

The Board is keen to hear from practitioners further about their experiences in returning to the profession and how the Board can better facilitate re-entry into the profession. In the coming months the Board will be conducting an online survey to gauge practitioners' experiences. If you have returned to the profession after a break from practice, the Board strongly encourages you to participate in the survey. If you are interested, please email otboardconsultation@ahpra.gov.au and we will be in touch once the survey is live.

Increasing engagement with education stakeholders

The Board has had the opportunity to engage with a range of stakeholders over the last six months and held highly productive and informative sessions, with Victorian and Queensland providers of occupational therapy education programs. The Board has taken these forums as an opportunity to discuss with education providers the work of the Board that impacts on the education sector, and explore with providers the issues and obligations of education providers in the context of the National Law.¹ The Board is planning to hold similar forums in other jurisdictions in the New Year.

In keeping with engaging more with education providers, the Board has also been keen to connect with students – particularly final-year students – to discuss role of the Board, the role of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the registration process, including when and how to apply for registration, and the obligations of practitioners. A webinar, *Graduating Soon?* was held in September, which was attended by 207 students completing occupational therapy programs of study. The webinar was a valuable opportunity to engage with students from all over the country. The Board hopes to continue to run webinars of this kind on an annual basis to coincide with the graduate application process.

The Board has also published its first video to support final-year students who will soon be seeking registration as an occupational therapist. This resource is an animated introduction to the Board and its requirements.

The Board has published these new resources on its [website](#).



Watch this video on [YouTube](#).

Occupational Therapy Board of Australia sets fees for 2016/17

In September 2016 the Board was pleased to announce a reduction in the annual registration fee from \$130 to \$110. This is the fourth year in a row that the Board has been able to reduce fees. The annual renewal fee will apply from 1 September 2016 and cover the registration period for most practitioners of 1 December 2016 to 30 November 2017.

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) is funded by practitioners' registration fees. The decision to reduce the fee ensures practitioners are not unduly burdened, but still provides sufficient income to allow the Board to meet its obligations in protecting the public.

Renewal of registration – apply online now

The Board has started the 2017 online renewal campaign, with AHPRA sending the first series of email reminders to renew in October 2016.

The Board encourages occupational therapists to renew their registration with the Board online by the **30 November** registration expiry date. Renewal applications received within a month after the expiry date will incur a late fee.

Under the National Law, occupational therapists who do not renew their registration within one month of their registration expiry date must be removed from the Register of Occupational Therapists. Their registration will lapse and they will not be able to practise or work as an occupational therapist in Australia until a new application for registration is approved.

Graduate applications now open online

Occupational therapy students who will soon complete an approved program of study can go online now to apply for registration before they graduate.

Graduates need to be registered as an occupational therapist with the Board before they start practising and must meet the Board's registration requirements.

The [online graduate application](#) service on the AHPRA website helps to smooth the path from study to work by enabling students to apply for registration four to six weeks before completing their course. All applicants must send some [supporting documents](#) to AHPRA by mail to complete their application.

Notifications

The Board would like to remind practitioners that under the National Law anyone can make a complaint about an occupational therapist's health, performance or conduct.

Poor professional performance is a common cause of complaints against occupational therapists.

¹ The Health Practitioner National Law, as in force in each state and territory.

Concise and contemporaneous clinical records are fundamental to good practice. It is important that notes include sufficient rationale for assessment and intervention decisions. Where the risks are high or you are working with particularly vulnerable clients, it is especially important to document your steps including the provision of information, informed consent, concerns or complaints raised and the response to these.

An occupational therapist whose practice is sound and who maintains high quality clinical records is well placed to account for or defend their conduct in an investigation or any legal proceedings.

Clear and effective communication is fundamental in all areas of practice, particularly in relation to ensuring that consumers or carers feel satisfied with the process or outcomes of care. Conscious focus on really good communication is one of the things which all practitioners can do to reduce risks and strengthen outcomes of care.

Further guidance on advertising obligations

National Boards across the National Scheme continue to discuss issues about claims in advertising, in particular claims about benefits of treatments.

The Board would like to remind all practitioners that they must comply with the provisions of the National Law on the advertising of regulated health services, relevant national, state and territory consumer protection legislation and, if applicable, legislation regulating the advertising of therapeutic goods.

The Board has published further information on its [website](#) to help occupational therapists better understand their advertising obligations, including [further information on advertising therapeutic claims](#).

This information does not replace the Board's [Guidelines for advertising regulated health services](#), which should be an occupational therapist's first point of reference to understanding their obligations.

The burden is on you to substantiate any claim you make that your treatments benefit patients. If you do not know whether the claims you have made can be substantiated based on acceptable evidence, then remove them from your advertising.

AHPRA is responsible for prosecuting breaches of the advertising requirements in the National Law. This means that AHPRA, with the Board, needs to decide whether there has been a breach of your advertising obligations.

These are serious matters that can have serious consequences for your professional standing and your criminal record:
if in doubt about a claim, leave it out of your advertising.

Snapshot of the profession

The latest quarterly data update, published in October, shows there are 18,304 registered occupational therapists in Australia. New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland have the largest numbers of registered practitioners.

The table below shows a complete picture of registered occupational therapists across Australia.

Table 1: Registration type by principal place of practice (PPP)

Registration Type	General	Provisional	Limited	Non-practising	Total
Registration Sub-type			Postgraduate training or supervised practice		
ACT	325	3	2	5	335
NSW	5,004	15	16	132	5,167
NT	173	0	0	2	175
QLD	3,395	6	17	126	3,544
SA	1,356	3	3	68	1,430
TAS	271	0	1	13	285
VIC	4,365	9	21	126	4,521
WA	2,507	4	9	106	2,626
No PPP	156	0	0	65	221
Total	17,552	40	69	643	18,304

For further details about the make-up of Australia's occupational therapy workforce, visit the [Statistics](#) page on the Board's website.

National Scheme news

2015/16 Annual Report Now published

The AHPRA and National Boards' annual report covering the financial year to 30 June 2016 was tabled in Parliament on Friday 11 November.

The report provides a nationwide snapshot of the work of AHPRA and the National Boards, including the Board, in implementing the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme). It also includes Board-specific data and highlights a multi-profession approach to risk-based regulation with a clear focus on ensuring that Australians have a safe and competent health workforce.

Insights from the year include:

- **More practitioners:** There were almost 20,000 more registrants in 2015/16 than there were last year, totalling 657,621 health practitioners across the 14 regulated health professions. Student registrations increased by more than 11,000 registrants year-on-year, to 153,710.
- **Growth in notifications:** There were 10,082 notifications received during the year, an increase of 19.7% nationally (representing 1.5% of the registration base). The top three notifier complaints related to clinical care (41.8%), medication issues (11.5%) and health impairment (10.7%). This may be attributed to greater awareness of the National Scheme, due to a nationwide campaign aimed at employers, practitioners and the general public.

- Improved monitoring and compliance to ensure public safety: 2,532 practitioners were being monitored for health, performance and/or conduct in 2015/16. A National Restrictions Library was launched, which currently contains 73 restrictions (conditions and undertakings) to improve national consistency.

To view the 2015/16 annual report in full, along with supplementary tables that break down data across categories such as registrations, notifications, statutory offences, tribunals and appeals, and monitoring and compliance, see the 2015/16 annual report [website](#).

Our recommendations to improve the health complaints management system in Queensland

AHPRA and the National Boards' joint submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Committee's inquiry into the performance of the Queensland Health Ombudsman's (OHO) functions has been [published](#).

The current health service complaints management system has now been in operation in Queensland for just over two years. It was intended to introduce a better system for health complaints management with greater transparency and accountability and improved timeliness in achieving an outcome.

While there are strengths to be found in the current model, there are significant areas that require urgent attention and improvements that cannot be achieved without change.

The Boards and AHPRA have identified key concerns supported by data and case studies:

- serious matters that pose a risk to the public are not being dealt with in a timely or appropriate way by the OHO
- matters that are considered minor by the OHO are closed or not accepted without any consideration by or referral to the Boards and AHPRA
- the current model and its implementation is costing more, using more resources, and is likely to result in increased registration fees for Queensland-based registered health practitioners, and
- the current model presents a conflict of interest for the OHO being both a partner in regulation and having oversight of AHPRA and Boards' performance.

Therefore, in our joint submission, AHPRA and the National Boards recommend that specific changes be made to the model in Queensland.

If our recommendations are acted on, Queenslanders, through the health minister and Queensland Parliament, would be assured that our regulatory expertise and that of the OHO as an ombudsman and health complaints authority, is applied in the best possible way to protect the Queensland public. Our respective resources would be used more effectively as the unnecessary delays and duplication in our roles would be addressed.

To read the full statement including the recommendations, visit AHPRA's [website](#), where you can also download it in PDF.

AHPRA and National Boards host research summit

AHPRA and the National Boards hosted more than 220 delegates at the 2016 Research Summit when everyone came together in August to talk about the next frontier for developing our partnership's evidence base to improve the way we regulate.

The theme of the summit was *patient safety through risk-based regulation*, and presenters discussed a range of topics. At the heart of the discussion was how to contribute to safer care for patients and health consumers. Also discussed, was how data collection and evaluation can help find new and innovative ways to improve regulatory processes for health practitioners and the public.

The inaugural summit provided an opportunity for the exchange of expertise and ideas between regulatory staff, experts in safety and quality in healthcare, health practitioners and leading health and medical researchers.

Read more in the [media release](#).

New Service charter published

An updated *Service charter* has been published by AHPRA on its website. The [charter](#) sets out the standard of service health practitioners, employers and the public can expect from the work of AHPRA in delivering the National Scheme.

Now a concise one-page document, the updated charter lists the 10 key objectives of AHPRA in providing a professional service while helping to regulate the health professions in the public interest.

Keep in touch with the Board

- Visit our website for [news about the profession](#) and for [registration standards, codes, guidelines, policies and fact sheets](#).
- Lodge an [online enquiry form](#).
- For registration enquiries call 1300 419 495 (from within Australia).
- Address mail correspondence to: Julie Brayshaw, Presiding Member, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, GPO Box 9958, Melbourne VIC 3001.