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Message from the Chair

Welcome to the second newsletter for 2017 from the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia (the Board).

2017 is progressing well and we have made significant progress on a number of our key projects.

In 2015 the Board commissioned a project to review the current *Australian competency standards for entry level occupational therapists* (the standards) developed by Occupational Therapy Australia in 2010. The Board's revision aligns with the review cycle set out in the standards. The Board was also keen to commission the review to ensure that the standards can be used for regulatory purposes.

This project has been a significant piece of work for the Board and we are pleased to note that with public consultation completed we are at the point of finalising the changes that need to be made to the standards. We have started planning for implementation of the standards, which we hope will begin towards the end of this year.

I'd encourage you all to visit the Board's website for more information over the coming months, as important updates will also be posted in communiqués and media releases.

We have also been working collaboratively with a number of other National Boards in reviewing the registration standards for continuing professional development,

recency of practice and professional indemnity insurance. Public consultation on these revised draft standards is anticipated later this year and we encourage your participation throughout the review process. *The Return to practice pathways project* has been the other key area of work for the Board in recent times. Feedback has been received from practitioners who have returned to work to better understand the constraints and barriers that impact on a person returning to work after a break in practice. We have made a significant change in how we assess registration applications for a person who is returning to work and also started developing a package of material to provide greater clarity, tips and guidance about how practitioners can return to work.

We have continued to host a series of successful education forums, and met with educators in New South Wales, the Occupational Therapy Council (Australia & New Zealand) Ltd. (OTC) and AHPRA representatives in March. These forums present a valuable opportunity to discuss the Board's project work and how it impacts on educators and explore with educators the issues and obligations that are required of them in the context of the National Law. We will be meeting with educators from South Australia in August. I also had the opportunity to host a breakfast forum in July preceding the Occupational Therapy Australia 2017 National Conference which was attended by around 120 stakeholders. It was pleasing to hear from participants that practitioners are wanting to engage with the Board not only about registration requirements, but also about wider policy work that the Board is undertaking.

Ms Julie Brayshaw

Chair, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia



Competency standards development project – update

Public consultation on the revised competency standards for occupational therapy practice closed on 30 March 2017. Extensive feedback was received from a range of stakeholders, including professional associations, the OTC, occupational therapists and consumers. The Board was very appreciative of the time and input provided by stakeholders.

The Board was pleased to note that the feedback was largely consistent with the changes that need to be made. The Board feels confident that this reflects that the revised standards are reflective of the broad scope of occupational therapy practice. We are now incorporating considered feedback into a final version of the standards.

Planning for the implementation of the revised standards is underway and the Board intends to release the standards and any necessary supporting materials towards the end of 2017 or in early 2018. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders in the months to follow to ensure a smooth implementation.

More information will be shared with you as this work progresses - please check the [News section](#) on the Board's website for updates.

Return to practice pathways project – update

The Board's Return to practice pathways project has evolved in recent months to address the feedback that was received from the profession as to the barriers and constraints that practitioners experience when returning to work after a break in practice. The Board in early 2017 called for expressions of interest from practitioners who had re-entered the profession to participate in a survey. The Board was heartened that practitioners were willing to share of their experiences. This engagement has highlighted the need for practitioners to have greater clarity and guidance about how they can meet the Board's expectations as outlined in the recency of practice registration standard. We have started developing a suite of new and updated material to be published on the Board's website towards the end of this year. The Board hopes this will simplify the process for re-entering the profession and provide tips and guidance about how to plan for a break in practice.

The Board's previous pathway for re-entry into practice was that a registrant would need to hold provisional registration in order to undertake supervised practice, before being eligible to hold general registration. Feedback to the Board has consistently expressed that this pathway is considered burdensome and can sometimes be a barrier to a person finding a suitable job. As a result of this feedback, the Board has made a significant change to its current pathway for re-entry into practice. Now if a practitioner does not meet the *recency of practice registration standard* they are eligible to hold general registration subject to a condition that they undertake supervised practice. The Board still requires supervision to be undertaken, as this will assure the suitability and competency of a practitioner who is

returning to work. Practitioners report that there may be stigma associated with holding provisional registration. The Board expects that this change will help reduce this and create a more streamlined registration process.

The Board notes that in some cases it may still determine that a practitioner should hold provisional registration in order to complete supervised practice, and this will typically be reserved for practitioners who have had extensive breaks from practice of between 10 and 20 years.

Call for applications for appointment to Registration and Notification Committee

The Board is inviting applications from registered occupational therapists seeking appointment to its Registration and Notification Committee (RNC). The RNC assists the Board with the assessment of complex applications for registration and all complaints about occupational therapists.

Appointments are made by the National Board under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law¹ (the National Law) and will initially be for one year, with eligibility for reappointment for up to three years. If appointed to the role, you would be expected to start in October 2017 and develop detailed knowledge of the National Law, the registration standards, codes and guidelines, practice standards and other professional regulatory requirements.

The RNC meets via teleconference at least once a month, and currently these meetings are held fortnightly. Committee members are remunerated in accordance with the AHPRA policies. An induction and mentoring process will be available for new members.

If you are interested in being involved in the regulation of the profession, the Board encourages you to [review the information](#) about the roles, eligibility requirements and the application process on their website.

Applications close 5 pm AEST Wednesday, 23 August 2017.

Code of conduct review

The [Code of conduct for occupational therapists](#) (the Code) is based on a common code used by 10 other National Boards (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice, Chinese Medicine, Chiropractic, Dental, Medical Radiation Practice, Optometry, Osteopathy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Podiatry) with some minor profession-specific changes for some Boards. The Board is reviewing the Code as part of the joint project to review the common code of conduct.

The Code is a regulatory document that provides an overarching guide to support and inform good practice and to help practitioners, Boards, employers, healthcare users and other stakeholders understand what good practice involves.

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

It seeks to help and support practitioners to deliver safe and effective health services within an ethical framework.

As the Code was last published in March 2014, Wednesday, 23 August 2017 the Board has started a scheduled review that will draw on best available research and data and involve additional stakeholder consultation and engagement. The Board is undertaking this review with other National Boards that use the common code.

The review is still at an early research phase. However, the Board is already considering how it can maximise opportunities for input when the consultation stage of the review starts. In addition to public consultation the Board intends to use its website and AHPRA social media to inform occupational therapists about how they can contribute to the review. The Board will also highlight opportunities to be involved in upcoming communiqués and newsletters.

Changes to practitioner registration fees 2017/18

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the Scheme) is funded by practitioners' registration fees. Over the past four years the Board has actively reduced practitioner fees to ensure practitioners are not unduly burdened, but still provides sufficient income to allow the Board to carry out its duties and protect the public.

Fees support the Board in the continual development of project work that focuses on developing a safe, mobile and efficient workforce for Australian occupational therapists.

A full fee schedule, including the fee arrangements for practitioners whose principal place of practice is NSW, will be published on the Board's website later this year. It will cover the registration period for most practitioners of 1 December 2017 to 30 November 2018.

Audit of registration standards

We would like to remind you that the Board will be conducting random audits into compliance with the following mandatory registration standards:

- continuing professional development
- recency of practice
- professional indemnity insurance arrangements, and
- criminal history.

If you are selected for audit, you will receive an audit notice in the mail from AHPRA. This will include a checklist that outlines what supporting documentation you will be required to submit in order to demonstrate that you have met the standard(s) being audited. [Further details about the audit process](#) can be found on the Board's website.

Breakfast forum attracts 120 delegates

This month, the Board held a breakfast forum preceding the Occupational Therapy Australia 2017 National Conference in Perth on 19 July 2017. Board Chair Julie Brayshaw hosted the forum and provided updates on the Board's project work and up-to-date information on trends and issues in notifications. At the end there was a Q&A session with participants which was well attended, with around 120 practitioners joining the Board Chair and AHPRA representatives for the session. Key themes from the questions raised included recency of practice, pathways for re-entry into practice, supervision and future notifications analysis.

The Board will continue to look at opportunities to further engage with practitioners as the year progresses.

New advertising information available for practitioners



The Board noted that new advertising information is now available on the AHPRA website to help dental practitioner **check** and **correct** their advertising so they **comply** with legal requirements.

It includes:

- examples of non-compliant advertising by registered health practitioners and changes that would help it to comply with the National Law
- information about AHPRA's process for managing advertising complaints, and
- a summary of advertising guidelines.

Occupational therapists are responsible for their advertising and must be able to substantiate any claims made that their treatments benefit patients. If in doubt about a claim, occupational therapists should leave it out of their advertising.

More about advertising requirements is in the Advertising resources section at www.ahpra.gov.au.

Occupational therapy regulation at work: Protecting the public in 2015/16

A profession-specific annual report summary that looks into the work of the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia over the year to 30 June 2016 was published in March, shortly after our last newsletter.

The report draws on data from the [2015/16 annual report](#) by AHPRA and the National Boards. This information provides a snapshot of the profession as at 30 June 2016, and includes the number of applications for registration, outcomes of criminal history checks and segmentation of the registrant base by gender, age and principal place of practice.

Insights into the profession include:

- Of the 657,621 registered health practitioners in Australia in 2015/16, 18,304 were occupational therapists (2.8% of the total registrant base).
- 2,200 new applications for registration as an occupational therapist were received.
- Registration for the occupational therapy profession grew by 6.4% during the year to 30 June 2016.
- Student registration decreased by 3.8%, to 7,922 registrants.
- 91.5% of occupational therapists are women; 8.5% are men.
- New South Wales was the principal place of practice for most occupational therapists (5,167).
- The Northern Territory was home to the least (175).
- The age bracket with the most occupational therapists was 25-29 (4,024 registrants).
- 1,777 occupational therapists were under 25 years of age; two were aged 75 or over.
- As part of the registration process, 2,288 criminal history checks were carried out for occupational therapists. Of 66 disclosable court outcomes, none required regulatory action.
- 59 notifications (complaints or concerns) were lodged about occupational therapists during the year, equating to less than 0.3% of the profession.
- No immediate action was taken to suspend or limit an occupational therapist's registration in 2015/16, compared to one instance in 2014/15.
- There were 38 active monitoring cases, with most relating to suitability/eligibility for registration as an occupational therapist.
- Six new complaints were made about possible offences relating to the use of the protected title 'occupational therapist' or about concerns relating to claims in advertising.

To download this report, or to view the main 2015/16 annual report and summary reports by state or territory, [visit our microsite](#).

National Scheme news

COAG Health Council meeting communique: progressing amendments to the National Law

The federal and state and territory health ministers met in Brisbane on 4 August 2017 at the [COAG Health Council](#) to discuss a range of national health issues. The meeting was chaired by the Victorian Minister for Health, the Hon. Jill Hennessy. AHPRA CEO Martin Fletcher attended the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council) meeting which brings together all health ministers throughout Australia to provide oversight for the work of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. AHPRA and the National Boards provide a regular update to the Ministerial Council on our work.

The meeting included an agreement by health ministers to proceed with amendments to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (the National Law) to strengthen penalties for offences committed by people who hold themselves out to be a registered health practitioner, including those who use reserved professional titles or carry out restricted practices when not registered. Ministers also agreed to proceed with an amendment to introduce a custodial sentence with a maximum term of up to three years for these offences. These important reforms will be fast tracked to strengthen public protection under the National Law. Preparation will now begin on a draft amendment bill, with a view to being introduced to the Queensland Parliament in 2018.

Ministers also discussed mandatory reporting provisions for treating health practitioners, agreeing that protecting the public from harm is of paramount importance as is supporting practitioners to seek help and treatment for their health concerns, including for their mental health and well-being. They agreed doctors should be able to confidentially seek treatment for health issues while preserving the requirement for patient safety. It was agreed that the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council will recommend a nationally consistent approach to mandatory reporting following a consultation process with consumer and practitioner groups. A proposal on mandatory reporting is expected to be considered at the November 2017 meeting of the COAG Health Council.

The Council produces a communiqué from its meeting which can be accessed on [AHPRA's website](#).

Working together to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patient safety

NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) week is a celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is an important week for all Australians, with celebrations held across Australia each July. This year NAIDOC week's theme was 'our languages matter'.

AHPRA and National Boards marked NAIDOC week (2-9 July) by reaffirming their commitment to an Australia-wide National Scheme Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health strategy.

AHPRA and the National Boards have been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector leaders and regulatory partners to get this important work started. As regulators of over 657,000 health practitioners in 14 different health professions, the opportunity to improve patient safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's health system is an important one. This commitment will be achieved through a [National Scheme Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy](#).

This work is about strong partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, not about AHPRA or the National Boards acting in isolation. The National Boards are working actively towards influencing cultural safety, equity and justice in healthcare for patients. A strategy group is in place which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector leaders and representatives from accreditation entities, National Boards, AHPRA, and the Chair of AHPRA's Agency Management Committee.

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, Chair, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, GPO Box 9958, Melbourne VIC 3001.

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Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
ABN: 78 685 433 429