



17 April 2024

Ms Sophie Dunstone
Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

By email only: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Dunstone

Response to information provided by Dr Van Zyl

Thank you for providing the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (**Ahpra**) the opportunity to inform the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee in response to a concern raised by Dr Van Zyl in the public hearing on 13 March 2024.

Ahpra CEO Martin Fletcher has previously provided information to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee on a number of occasions in response to the same issue.

On 9 March 2021, the National Boards for the 16 health professions regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme issued a joint position statement to explain and clarify the application of existing professional obligations as expressed in codes of conduct and other regulatory frameworks in the context of the emerging Covid 19 pandemic. The statement did not create any new restrictions or obligations, but rather explained how these obligations which pre-dated the pandemic, applied in the specific context of the pandemic and the public health response.

Essentially, the position statement reminded registered health practitioners of their obligation to use their professional judgement and best available evidence in providing information and care to patients and the public about public health issues such as Covid-19 and vaccination. The Medical Board of Australia referenced the position statement in their monthly newsletter, emailed to practitioners in March 2021. A copy of that newsletter is published here: <https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/News/Newsletters/March-2021.aspx>

The primary concern of National Boards and Ahpra is the safety of the public. Health practitioner regulation in Australia aims to ensure that the public can have confidence that they will receive safe, effective and evidence based care and information from registered health practitioners.

I trust that this information is of assistance to the Committee.

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Ahpra and the National Boards regulate these registered health professions: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice, Chinese medicine, chiropractic, dental, medical, medical radiation practice, midwifery, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathy, paramedicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology.

Yours sincerely

Ms Kym Ayscough

Acting Chief Executive Officer