

Australian College of Nurse Practitioners response to:

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

**Administration of registration and notifications by the Australian
Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and related entities under
the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law**

Australian College of Nurse Practitioners

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30th April 2021

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Administration of registration and notifications by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and related entities under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.

The Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) is the national peak organisation for Nurse Practitioners, advancing nursing practice and consumer access to health care. We actively seek opportunities to contribute to improvements to safety, quality and access to health care.

Please see below for comments relating to the terms of reference from the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners.

(a) the current standards for registration of health practitioners by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the National Boards under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (National Law);

ACNP comments – we support common and similar standards across the professions, and specifically consistency across criminal history and English language skills. It is also important to ensure recency of practice, continuing professional development and professional indemnity insurance standards are consistent across all standards, and while we understand there are specifics relating to individual professions, we support minimum standards and consistent approaches, with a mandated requirement to address each of these areas.

(b) the role of AHPRA, the National Boards, and other relevant organisations, in addressing concerns about the practice and conduct of registered health practitioners;

ACNP comments – AHPRA's current role is appropriate

(c) the adequacy and suitability of arrangements for health practitioners subject to supervised practice as part of the registration process or due to a notification;

ACNP comments – Supervision arrangements are appropriate, we consider it important to have supervision as a pathway to ensure safety.

(d) the application of additional requirements for overseas-qualified health practitioners seeking to become registered in their profession in Australia;

ACNP comments – We support reasonable additional requirements to establish the relevance, quality and validity of education, qualifications and practice to meet Australian registration standards, and English language standards. While we do not support excessive, onerous or lengthy processes, safety of the public must be the first priority.

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(e) the role of universities and other education providers in the registration of students undertaking an approved program of study or clinical training in a health profession;

ACNP comments – Universities and other education providers must uphold and maintain appropriate entry criteria for courses that lead to registration of health professionals, and ensure approved programs of study can reasonably support a student to meet registration standards within a reasonable time from completing the course.

ACNP is aware of a number of approved courses leading to registration or endorsement that generally fail to produce students able to satisfy registration standards, and those students are not able to proceed to practice. We are advocating for students and health professionals with appropriate bodies to have this addressed as much as possible through improving entry criteria, and having more focus on registration standards in course development.

(f) access, availability and adequacy of supports available to health practitioners subject to AHPRA notifications or other related professional investigations;

ACNP comments – ACNP has experienced a number of members who do not feel supported throughout notifications processes, and would welcome a peer support process. We are aware that most complaints do not progress to findings against the practitioner, however often the damage to the practitioner is significant, personally, professionally, and through reputation. We are also aware of a number of vexatious complaints, and the related issues that make it difficult for the Boards to address them. Having peer support would assist greatly through this process, along with an independent and confidential counselling service for health professionals following notification, and during investigations.

(g) the timeliness of AHPRA's investigation of notifications, including any delays in handling, assessment and decision-making, and responsiveness to notifiers;

ACNP comments – We are aware of significantly long processes following notifications, and any improvements to streamline processes would be welcome. This issue could also be partially addressed through peer support and independent/confidential counselling services.

(h) management of conflict of interest and professional differences between AHPRA, National Boards and health practitioners in the investigation and outcomes of notifications;

ACNP comments – AHPRA must take a lead role in the management of conflicts as the central and overarching body who works in the interests of the public. Conflict of interest will inevitably arise, and must be declared and handled efficiently.

(i) the role of independent decision-makers, including state and territory tribunals and courts, in determining the outcomes of certain notifications under the National Law;

ACNP comments – No feedback

(j) mechanisms of appeal available to health practitioners where regulatory decisions are made about their practice as a result of a notification;

ACNP comments – The mechanism for appeal is appropriate

(k) how the recommendations of previous Senate inquiries into the administration of notifications under the National Law have been addressed by the relevant parties; and

ACNP comments – no comments

(l) any other related matters.

ACNP comments – no comments

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this vitally important consultation. I would be happy to discuss our responses or contribute again in future, and we look forward to the outcomes of this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Leanne Boase
President
Australian College of Nurse Practitioners

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