

## Message from the Chair

Dear Colleagues

This is the first newsletter from the Optometry Board of Australia (the Board), established under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme). It outlines the details of the National Scheme and highlights some of the new obligations for optometrists under this National Scheme. It also outlines a major consultation the Board is undertaking on therapeutic qualifications.

Optometry and nine other professions joined the National Scheme on 1 July 2010, with our colleagues in Western Australia joining on 18 October 2010. Each state and territory has passed legislation that allows for the establishment of a National Board for the optometry profession. The objectives of the National Scheme and the Board are to protect the public by ensuring that only optometrists who are suitably trained and qualified to practise in a competent and ethical manner are registered, and to facilitate the provision of high-quality education and training of optometrists.

The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory does not solve all the complexity for optometrists working in different jurisdictions as other laws (such as drugs and poisons legislation applicable to optometrists with endorsement for scheduled medicines) are still the responsibility of the states and territories. The Board will continue to work with the states and territories to negotiate efficiencies and consistency in these areas.

With the transition to the National Scheme, the Board is able to draw on the expertise of practitioners and community representatives from all states and territories through its Board and Committee membership. This newsletter tells you a little about the Board members and the committees the Board has established.

One significant benefit is gained by the ten National Boards functioning in a single administrative and legislative context, and the capacity to consider issues jointly in the interest of protection of the Australian public through high standards of health profession regulation.

The work of the 10 National Boards is supported by the Australian Health Practitioner

Regulation Agency (AHPRA). More information on AHPRA is available at [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au).

The Board encourages you to access its website at [www.optometryboard.gov.au](http://www.optometryboard.gov.au) regularly. It is the major means of communication for the Board and will build on the overview contained in this newsletter.

The Board is committed to providing ongoing updates in the form of electronic newsletters and intends to send future electronic newsletters directly to your email address. I would encourage you to register a current email address with AHPRA. This can be done by completing this form: 'Request for change of address details on the register - CHDT-00', accessible by visiting the AHPRA website and following the prompts from Forms/Common Applications Forms.

Colin Waldron  
Chair  
Optometry Board of Australia

## National registration – an overview

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme came into effect on 1 July 2010 in all states and territories except Western Australia which joined on 18 October 2010.

With national registration, 10 National Boards replaced 85 boards based in all the states and territories. Health practitioners are now registered under nationally-consistent legislation, replacing 66 different Acts of Parliament.

The objectives of the National Law are to:

- protect the public by ensuring that only practitioners who are suitably trained and qualified to practise in a competent and ethical manner are registered
- facilitate workforce mobility across Australia
- facilitate the provision of high-quality education and training of health practitioners
- facilitate the rigorous and responsive assessment of overseas-trained health practitioners
- facilitate access to services provided by health practitioners in accordance with the public interest
- enable the continuous development of a flexible, responsive and sustainable Australian health workforce and



- enable innovation in the education of and service delivery by health practitioners

The intended benefits of the National Scheme over time include:

- Mobility: Register once (general registration), practise across Australia
- Uniformity: Consistent national standards – registration and professional conduct
- Efficiency: Less red tape - streamlined, effective over time
- Collaboration: Sharing, learning and understanding of innovation and good regulatory practice between professions and
- Transparency: national online registers displaying registered health practitioners, including current conditions on practice (except health-related conditions)

The following professions all became part of the National Scheme in 2010:

- Optometry
- Chiropractic
- Dental
- Medical
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Osteopathy
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Psychology

Practitioners in an additional four professions will be registered under the National Scheme from 2012:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers
- Chinese medicine practitioners
- medical radiation technology practitioners and
- occupational therapists.

## Who does what in health practitioner regulation?

### *The Optometry Board of Australia*

Members of the inaugural Optometry Board of Australia were appointed for three years by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council) on 31 August 2009. The Board has nine members, six of whom are registered practitioners and three of whom are community members.

The members of the Board are Colin Waldron (Chair and practitioner member from Queensland), Ian Bluntish (practitioner member, South Australia), John Davis (practitioner member, New South Wales), Judith Dikstein (community member), Jane Duffy (practitioner member, Victoria), Derek Fails (practitioner member, Tasmania), Garry Fitzpatrick (practitioner member, Western Australia), Peta Frampton (community member) and Lawson Lobb (community member).



*Left to right: Mr Lawson Lobb, Ms Peta Frampton, Mr Garry Fitzpatrick, Ms Jane Duffy, Mr Ian Bluntish, Mr Colin Waldron, Mr John Davis, Mr Derek Fails, Ms Judith Dikstein.*

The Board met for the first time in September 2009 and meets for one day every month except January. The Board publishes a communiqué on its website after each meeting. This is a great way for optometrists to keep informed of the decisions and workings of the Board.

The functions of the Board include:

- registering optometrists and students
- developing standards, codes and guidelines for the optometry profession
- handling notifications, complaints, investigations and disciplinary hearings
- registering overseas-trained practitioners who wish to practise in Australia and
- approving accreditation standards and accredited courses of study.

The Board has the responsibility of maintaining and considering professional standards, accreditation and workforce issues. The Board has drawn on additional outside professional expertise to address these matters.

The Board has appointed committees to advise the Board and to make decisions where the Board has delegated powers under the National Law. The Board's committees are:

- Continuing Professional Development Accreditation Committee
- Finance and Risk Committee and
- Policies, Standards and Guidelines Advisory Committee

- Registration and Notifications Committee
- Scheduled Medicines Advisory Committee.

The Registrations and Notifications Committee has local representatives from all jurisdictions to ensure local issues are considered and relevant advice is available to AHPRA offices in each jurisdiction. This allows for an effective and timely response.

The Board thanks the members of these Advisory Committees for the invaluable contribution they make to the functioning of the National Scheme.

#### *Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand*

The Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ) accredit programs of study for the optometry profession and assess overseas-qualified optometrists for registration in Australia. More information can be found on the Council's website: [www.ocanz.org](http://www.ocanz.org).

#### *Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency*

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) supports the National Boards in their core role of protecting the public. The Boards cannot enter into contracts and cannot employ staff. They rely on AHPRA to provide the human resources and infrastructure to manage all registrations, notifications and financial aspects on behalf of the Board.

There is an AHPRA office in every state and territory. These offices are the point of contact for all your registration enquiries. Contact details for these offices are available on the AHPRA website.

---

## Work of the Board so far...

### *Registration standards*

Since its first meeting on 20 September 2009, the Board has undertaken a significant amount of work to have things in place for the implementation of the National Scheme. It developed registration standards and approved codes and guidelines after wide-ranging consultation. The Ministerial Council approved the registration standards for optometrists on:

- criminal history
- English language skills
- professional indemnity insurance
- continuing professional development
- recency of practice and
- endorsement of scheduled medicines.

### *Codes and guidelines*

The Board approved a code of conduct and guidelines for optometry for:

- mandatory notifications
- continuing professional development (CPD)

- professional indemnity insurance (PII)
- use of scheduled medicines
- prescription of ocular appliances and
- advertising of health services.

All optometrists should take the time to familiarise themselves with the new requirements under the National Scheme. The Board has created a *New Obligations for Optometrists – Fact Sheet* that summarises these requirements. It is available on the *FAQs and Fact Sheet* section of the Board's website.

The Board would like to acknowledge the cooperation and support of Optometrists Association Australia in developing the standards and guidelines and the assistance it has provided in communicating with registrants.

---

## Registration renewal

Optometrists will be aligned with an annual renewal of registration date of 30 November under the National Scheme.

During the transition period from 1 July 2010 to 30 November 2011, renewal dates across the states and territories will differ, as these depend on how long previous registration at the state or territory level extended past 1 July 2010.

This means renewal fees across the states and territories will be different during this transition period until registration dates are aligned nationally. Registration fees for optometrists will only be invested in regulating the optometry profession, in the public interest, to ensure that the trust the public places in the optometry profession continues to be well-founded.

November 2010 to the end of January 2011 was a peak renewal time for some of the states and territories with many professions renewing simultaneously for the first time under the National Scheme. These peaks should be minimised in future with the introduction of nationally-aligned renewal dates which are different across professions.

Optometrists can easily renew online now using their password and login ID provided in the letter received from AHPRA about renewal. Optometrists who have not received renewal information as they expected should call AHPRA on 1300 419 495 or use the online enquiry form available on the AHPRA website.

---

## Work for 2011

The Board is committed to the ongoing review of the registration standards and codes and guidelines it has already developed and the development of future bodies of work to protect the public through best practice regulation of the optometry profession.

The Board's first major undertaking for 2011 is a consultation process on the proposal for therapeutic



qualifications as a requirement for general registration. This is a critical issue for the Board and the profession. All registered optometrists have been sent a letter and a copy of the consultation paper. These documents are also available on the Board's website under *News & Updates – Current consultation section*.

The training necessary for therapeutic endorsement has been incorporated into existing optometry courses in Australia and New Zealand so that, from 2014, all Australian and New Zealand graduates will be eligible for registration with endorsement to prescribe or supply scheduled medicines.

There are a number of important potential consequences arising from this:

- from 2014, therapeutic qualification will be the expected minimum-entry qualifications for optometrists
- from 2014, there will be two levels of practice within the profession and
- if current arrangements remain in place, the majority of optometrists entering the profession from overseas may not meet the qualification standard demanded of new graduates of local courses.

Given these consequences, to maintain clarity, consistency and equity in the registration arrangements and meet community expectations, the Board is considering the proposal that therapeutic qualification become a requirement for general registration.

There are no specific requirements on the nature and content of submissions; however, the Board is interested particularly in responses addressing some key questions outlined in the consultation document.

Submissions are welcome up to close of business Friday 4 March 2011.

## Continuing professional development

The Board has created a specific continuing professional development (CPD) section on its website to help optometrists understand the requirements of the Board's registration standard on continuing professional development.

The section draws all CPD-specific standards, guidelines and policies together. It also lists a set of frequently asked questions and a list of non-accredited providers and

activities that will be generally be approved by the Board for the purpose of the CPD requirements.

This information will be updated on a regular basis.

## Use of diagnostic drugs

The use of certain Schedule 4 medicines by registered optometrists for diagnostic purposes during an eye examination is considered by the Board to be a core part of contemporary optometric practice. Most registered optometrists working in Australia have trained in the use of such 'diagnostic drugs'. There are, however, a small number of registered optometrists who do not hold qualifications in the use of diagnostic drugs and who may not have the competencies necessary to undertake an eye examination consistent with contemporary standards of optometry practice. These practitioners must ensure they practise within the scope of practice in which they are educated and competent.

## Keeping up-to-date

The Board is committed to providing regular newsletters in electronic format directly to your email address and so would encourage you to register a current email address with AHPRA. This can be done by completing the form 'Request for change of address details on the register - CHDT-00' available on the AHPRA website at: <http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registration-Process/Common-Application-Forms.aspx>.

Optometrists are encouraged to review the Board's website on a regular basis to keep themselves informed. The Board publishes a summary of its monthly Board meeting on the News and Update section of its website.

## Contacting the Board

The Optometry Board of Australia and AHPRA may be contacted by telephone on 1300 419 495. More information on the Board is available at [www.optometryboard.gov.au](http://www.optometryboard.gov.au) and more information on AHPRA is available at [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au).

An online enquiry form is available on both websites under *Contact us* or mail correspondence can be directed to the Board by addressing correspondence to Colin Waldron, Chair, Optometry Board of Australia, GPO Box 9958, Melbourne Vic 3001.

