



FIRST MEETING OF THE OPTOMETRY BOARD OF AUSTRALIA, 20 SEPTEMBER 2009

The first meeting of the Optometry Board of Australia was held on 20 September 2009 at the Aitken Hill conference and events venue near Melbourne. The Board is established under the *Health Practitioner Regulation (Administrative Arrangements) National Law Act 2008*. Appointments under this Act were announced by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council on 31 August 2009.

The nine members of the Board are Mr Colin Waldron (Chair), Mr Ian Bluntish, Mr John Davis, Ms Judith Dikstein, Ms Jane Duffy, Mr Derek Fails, Mr Garry Fitzpatrick, Ms Peta Frampton and Mr Lawson Lobb.

Ahead of their Sunday meeting, members of the Optometry Board of Australia met with members of the other nine boards for a full-day induction program on Saturday, 19 September. The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP, Minister for Health, Victoria, spoke to the induction program on behalf of all Ministers on the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council.

The members of the Optometry Board of Australia acknowledged the responsibility that had been given to them by the Ministerial Council. They committed themselves to doing everything they could to build a world-class system of health practitioner regulation for the protection of the Australia community and for their profession.

The Board agreed that a key part of its work program will be consultation with the community, the profession and the existing State and Territory boards on matters on which they or the Ministerial Council must make decisions. The Board agreed that it needed the wisdom and experience of many people outside the Board to do its job effectively.

The Board also noted the importance of communication with the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council and government authorities, the Board's accrediting authority, Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand, the other nine national boards, health complaints entities in the States and Territories and tribunals in each State and Territory.

The Board noted that the Chairs of all the national boards had issued a statement on 17 September providing early advice of a consultation process in late October and November around registration and related matters. Consultation papers would be posted on the Board's website.

The main focus of the Board's first meeting was discussion of the proposals that would be the subject of this consultation. The Board agreed to have a further three meetings before Christmas 2009. Following the consultation period, the Board will finalise its position on registration proposals. At its December meeting the Board will complete this work in order to provide the proposals to the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council for decision.

The Board acknowledged the tight timetable for completion of the initial part of its work. The timetable was necessary so that all registrants could have advice ahead of the commencement day on 1 July 2010 of the new registration standards and requirements.

At its first meeting, the Board agreed to prepare for consultation in late October proposals on the following matters:

- the five mandatory registration standards, namely standards on requirements for professional indemnity insurance, matters about the criminal history of applicants for registration, requirements for continuing professional development, requirements for English language skills and requirements in relation to previous practice, and
- a proposed registration standard setting out the Board's requirements for scheduled medicines endorsement, for those optometrists who wish to be endorsed and authorised to prescribe Schedule 4 medicines as part of their optometry practice.

The Board also considered detailed proposals for how individual registrants will transition from their current registration to the new registration categories set out in the proposed National Law. The Board commissioned further work on this with a view to being able to settle those matters which did not require Ministerial Council consideration at its next meeting.

The Board considered a number of administrative and financial matters. The Board was mindful of the need to ensure the scheme ran efficiently for registrants. In light of this, the Board agreed to commence work on a target budget for 2010-11 which was based on the existing fee revenue available to current boards increased by a factor to reflect increases in the cost of living.

Further work was required on whether such a budget was practical and how it would translate into fees for registrants. The Board noted the current differences between fees in different States and Territories and also the effect of removal of fees for practitioners currently registered in more than one jurisdiction.

The Board agreed to work through a number of matters over the next two meetings in order to try to reach agreement on the services it required, the total budget and the fees to be charged to registrants for inclusion in its Health Profession Agreement with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

At this meeting, the Board considered options for structuring State and Territory boards. While the Board considered it important to retain the essential local skills and experience of existing State and Territory board members, it has decided State and Territory boards will not be required in the first instance. The Board has decided to adopt more flexible arrangements. Under the proposed legislation, the national board may appoint individuals to a list of persons approved to be appointed as members of panels. The Optometry Board of Australia will ensure that individuals from every State and Territory are included on this list and, in line with the proposed legislation, that the panel will include wherever possible at least one member from the relevant jurisdiction. The Board may also need to appoint local ad hoc committees from time to time as required, and will maintain a list of qualified local practitioners who will be called on as needed to provide advice to the national Board. The Board proposes to monitor the effectiveness and responsiveness of these arrangements, and review periodically the need for more formal structural arrangements.

The Board agreed that it was desirable for all registrants in a particular profession to be registered on a standard timetable nationally. The Board agreed that the renewal date for optometry practitioners would be 30 November each year. The Board noted that practitioners whose registration at 1 July 2010 finished on a different date would transition over the next registration cycle to the new date.

In terms of business procedures, the Board agreed to a detailed procedure relating to the requirement in legislation for declarations of Conflict of Interest at the commencement of each meeting, meeting procedures and speaking on behalf of the Board. The Board also agreed to its logo as shown at the head of this statement, and noted that its website to be set up in the near future would have the domain name www.optometryboard.gov.au.

The Board acknowledged the very considerable amount of support which had been given for its first meeting. It acknowledged the work done by existing State and Territory boards, its accrediting authority, Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand, AHPRA and the National Registration and Accreditation Implementation Project team and looked forward to working with these groups in the next stages of its work.

Colin Waldron
Chair, Optometry Board of Australia
23 September 2009