

**Feedback to inquiry into the performance of  
AHPRA**

**Presented to Victorian Legislative Council -  
Legal and Social Issues Legislation  
Committee**

**April 2013**

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## About the APA

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) is the peak body representing the interests of over 13,000 physiotherapists and their patients. APA members are registered with the Physiotherapy Board of Australia, have undertaken to meet the APA Code of Conduct, are expected to use the latest research in practice and often have further and/or specialist qualifications.

The APA sets a high standard for professional competence and behaviour and advocates best practice care for clients. It is our belief that all Australians should have access to quality physiotherapy, when and where required, to optimise health and wellbeing.

## Vision

To be a focus of excellence for the global physiotherapy community.

## Belief

All Australians should have access to quality physiotherapy, when and where required, to optimise health and wellbeing.

## Mission

To evolve into a more member-centric organisation that gives value to members and to support our belief.

## Feedback to inquiry into the performance of AHPRA

### Background

On 23 October 2012, the Victorian Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

*That, with reference to the 2009-10 and 2010-11 reports of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, tabled in this House on 8 February 2011 and 7 December 2011 respectively, and any subsequent reports of the Agency tabled in this House, this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee to inquire into, consider and report on the performance of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency including the cost effectiveness, the regulatory efficacy of and the ability of the National Scheme to protect the Victorian public and the Committee is required to present its final report no later than 29 November 2013.*

### The APA recommends

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) has been strongly supportive of the recommendation articulated by the Productivity Commission in 2006 to establish a single national registration board for health professionals, as well as a single national accreditation board for health professional education and training; to deal with workforce shortages/pressures faced by the Australian health workforce and to increase their flexibility, responsiveness, sustainability, mobility and reduce red tape.

The physiotherapy profession invested significant resources in providing feedback during the consultation phase that led to the establishment of the scheme and more or less agrees that the new arrangements help health professionals move around the country more easily, reduce red tape, provide greater safeguards for the public and promote a more flexible, responsive and sustainable health workforce.

In answer to the specific concerns raised in the Terms of Reference for this inquiry the APA wishes to make the following comments regarding cost effectiveness, the regulatory efficacy of and the ability of the National Scheme to protect the Victorian public.

### Cost effectiveness

There has not been a significant change in the cost to physiotherapists in Victoria since the introduction of the scheme. Any changes to the charges applied by the Physiotherapy Board of Australia can be justified by the increased scope of activities now being undertaken.

### Regulatory efficacy of the National Scheme

#### **Transition issues**

The APA recognises that during its first year of operation AHPRA had a number of teething problems. This was exacerbated during the period of renewals from December 2010 – January 2011. Key problems at the time included:

- Failure of physiotherapists to receive renewal notices.
- Failure of AHPRA e-commerce system to process payments.
- Failure to respond to communication in a reasonable period of time from registered physiotherapists and from the APA as their advocates.

- Failure to provide contact details for key AHPRA staff, thus exacerbating communication problems.

During the last two annual registration periods at the end of 2011 and 2012 these problems had largely disappeared.

The APA thus recommended that AHPRA increase its levels of direct communication with the professional associations. The establishment of the Professions Reference Group (PRG) was in direct response to this suggestion and has been an effective consultation and communication forum for the registered professions and the continuation of the information exchange within a formal advisory committee to the staff of AHPRA was been valuable.

Finally the issue of access to data from annual practitioner's survey needs to be resolved. The APA was of the understanding that this information would be made available in a de-identified manner to facilitate greater understanding of the workforce. To date this has not occurred.

### ***Australian Standards for Physiotherapy***

Prior to the establishment of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme the Australian Physiotherapy Council (APC), was appointed by the physiotherapy profession to act as custodian of the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy. As part of this role it was required to regularly oversee and review the standards to ensure that they maintained their relevance to entry level physiotherapy practitioners.

In 2012 there was some discussion regarding ownership of the standards. It was determined by the Physiotherapy Board of Australia, despite our objections, that they will assume ownership. It is the view of the APA that the ownership of these standards should be retained by the profession and not be owned by the Physiotherapy Board of Australia. The APA recognises that the Board needs to have some certainty in this regards to enable it to undertake its core functions. We are however unconvinced that this move will improve regulatory efficiencies.

### ***Specialist Registration***

A key driver for the establishment of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme was to ensure we have a nationally consistent approach across the ten health professions. However the push for consistency does not mean the same process should be universally applied. The APA believes that the system should be robust enough to accommodate unique differences between professions.

Those professions with a clearly defined specialisation processes – such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, podiatry and physiotherapy – should be treated in a consistent manner in relation to specialist practice. This is currently not the case as specialist registration for physiotherapy has been blocked since 2010.

The APA has been waiting for nearly three years for Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (AHWMC) to approve a framework for the specialist registration in physiotherapy and it is not clear when this decision will be made.

Any decision by AHWMC not to allow national registration of Specialist Physiotherapists will be a major step backwards for the Victorian public's capacity to identify and access quality care with confidence. It will also undo a decade spent developing the breadth of the profession from physiotherapy assistants through to Specialists, to create a more flexible and responsive workforce in Victoria.

This delay in acknowledging specialist physiotherapists in the new scheme, has denied the public, the various levels of government / non-government sector and other registrants the ability to identify and access the small number of practitioners who have completed an accredited training and examination at an advanced level.

On this issue alone the regulatory efficacy of the National Scheme has clearly failed to deliver.

### **Ability of the National Scheme to protect the Victorian public**

The APA believes that the new scheme provides greater protection to the Victorian public through the establishment of a national register which prevents physiotherapists (or other registered health professionals) from moving to another jurisdiction to avoid the application of a penalty or deregistration.