



## Joint communiqué

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### Notifications workshop held on 16 February 2018

Members of the Dental Board of Australia (the Board), along with staff from the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), met with representatives from the Dental Hygienists Association of Australia (DHAA), Australian Dental Prosthetists Association (ADPA) and the Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association (ADOHTA) on 16 February 2018. The workshop focused on building a joint understanding of how notifications (complaints) are managed in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme).

#### Understanding the notification process

Participants welcomed the opportunity to further understand the notifications process. Participants acknowledged that the notifications process has an important role in protecting the public and in promoting confidence in the dental profession.

Highlights included how notifications are assessed and managed according to risk, and how the Board's local decision-making committees, consisting of dental practitioners and community members, make the decisions about dental notifications.

The Board and AHPRA acknowledged that the length of time it can take to complete a notification has been an area of concern. While, some notifications are considered complex, the general view is that the notification process has been taking too long. It was noted that when notifications are investigated, they usually represent the most serious matters and may affect the timeliness of the investigation process.

AHPRA has made a number of changes to the way it works to enable early and effective assessment of risks to the public when it receives a notification. AHPRA also continues to work towards reducing the length of time it takes to investigate a notification with initiatives such as obtaining early clinical advice, triaging notifications and using existing staff resources more efficiently.

The participants were pleased to learn about the notification process, along with recent improvements and acknowledged the willingness of the Board and AHPRA to engage with the professional associations through ongoing dialogue.

#### Experience of practitioners

The Board and AHPRA acknowledged what the effects of receiving a notification can have on individual practitioners.

The Board and AHPRA acknowledged that despite the fact that around 70 per cent of dental notifications are closed with no action taken, many practitioners regard being the subject of a notification as very stressful.

The Board and AHPRA are taking steps to improve the experience for practitioners who are subject to a notification. A recent initiative highlighted at the workshop was the introduction of an ongoing survey of practitioners who have been the subject of a notification, which seeks their feedback on accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, timeliness and fairness.

While the results have helped to make improvements to the practitioner experience, there remain a number of areas for ongoing focus. These include the need for more information and updates to the practitioner during the process with a shift from a paper-based culture to staff telephoning practitioners to provide this information, early clinical discussions with practitioners and conducting targeted investigations.

## Summary

The participants commended the Board and AHPRA on their willingness to meet with ADPA, ADOHTA and DHAA to listen to concerns and seek feedback.

All participants valued the opportunity to contribute to strengthening the notification process with the professional associations highlighting steps they can also take to continue to support their members, such as, offering peer support and advice, encouraging members to obtain early legal advice and the ongoing promotion of safe practice.

The Board was represented by Dr John Lockwood AM, Chair, Ms Jenny Bishop, practitioner member, Mrs Susan Aldenhoven AM, practitioner member, Mr Paul House, practitioner member, Dr Murray Thomas, practitioner member, Dr Sajeev Koshy, practitioner member, Ms Kim Jones, community member and Mr Robin Brown, community member.

AHPRA was represented by Mr Matthew Hardy, National Director of Notifications, Ms Susan Biggar, National Engagement Advisor, Notifications and other senior AHPRA staff.

The ADOHTA was represented by Mr Tan Nguyen, President, Ms Leticia Masters, Vice President, Ms Nicole Stormon, Secretary and Ms Hellene Platell, Immediate Past Present.

The ADPA was represented by Mr Jeremy Irvine, CEO and Ms Di Woolcock, Engagement Manager.

The DHAA was represented by Dr Melanie Hayes, CEO, Ms Kathryn Novak, President, Ms Tabitha Acret, Vice President, Cheryl Dey, Treasurer and Mr Shamus Breen, Insurance representative.