**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Ombudsman and Commissioner makes recommendations to safeguard the confidentiality of people making notifications about registered health practitioners**

Today the [National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner](https://nhpopc.gov.au/) published her report on the independent review of confidentiality safeguards for people making notifications about registered health practitioners.

The review was launched at the request of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) after the conviction of South Australian general practitioner Dr Brian Holder for the attempted murder of pharmacist Kelly Akehurst. Ms Akehurst had made a notification to Ahpra about Dr Holder’s prescribing practices and it is thought that the notification was the motive for the crime.

The Ombudsman and Commissioner, Richelle McCausland, found that while Ahpra’s current approach offers reasonable safeguards for notifiers, some improvements could be made.

Ms McCausland made ten recommendations for improvement, including that Ahpra:

* introduces a new step in the notification process focussed on proactively assessing whether it is necessary to disclose the notifier’s identity to the practitioner
* improves how confidential and anonymous notifications are managed and how information about privacy is communicated to notifiers
* seeks amendment to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to make it an offence to harm, threaten, intimidate, harass or coerce a notifier
	+ develops and publishes a framework for identifying and managing vexatious notifications.

“The notifications process is an important way that Ahpra and the National Health Practitioner Boards are informed about potential risks to public safety,” said Ms McCausland.

“It is essential that everyone, from patients and family members, to health service employers and colleagues, feel safe to make a notification if needed.”

The Ombudsman and Commissioner also highlighted that the handling of notifications must be fair to practitioners who have had a notification made about them.

“Practitioners need to know the nature of the allegations raised in a notification and in some circumstances, the practitioner may need to know the notifier’s identity to effectively respond,” said Ms McCausland.

The Ombudsman and Commissioner found that while it is ideal if the notifier’s identity is disclosed to the relevant practitioner, Ahpra’s current process of receiving confidential and anonymous notifications is in line with the approach taken by other regulators both nationally and internationally.

There may also be some instances where the notifer’s identity is not fundamentally linked to the allegations being made about the practitioner and it is not necessary for the practitioner to know the notifier’s identity to effectively respond.

Ahpra Chief Executive, Martin Fletcher, has welcomed the review.

‘‘Information disclosed to us by notifiers is critical to our work as a regulator and keeping the public safe. So, it is vital that individuals feel safe to raise their concerns with us.

 We support strengthening the protection of notifiers from risks of harm and we will adopt all ten recommendations, a number of which we are already progressing,’ Mr Fletcher said.

“I am pleased that Ahpra has accepted all recommendations from my review and has already taken steps to implement them.” said Ms McCausland.

**For more information or for high resolution images please contact** Lara Beissbarth on 0429 313 950 or at lara.beissbarth@nhpopc.gov.au