# Media release

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### The National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner 2017–18 annual report shows continued growth and positive change

The 2017–18 annual report for the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner (NHPOPC) highlights how every complaint has the potential to influence positive change in the administration of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme).

The role of the NHPOPC is to assist people who are dissatisfied with administrative processes of the Australian Health Practitioner Agency (AHPRA) and the 15 National Boards. The NHPOPC provides a free and independent complaint-handling service to both members of the public and health practitioners. An investigation by the NHPOPC examines whether the administrative actions of AHPRA and the National Boards are lawful and reasonable, whether policies and procedures have been complied with, and whether all relevant considerations have been taken into account when making decisions.

NHPOPC Richelle McCausland emphasised the important systemic improvements achieved by her office in 2017–18: ‘Complaints can provide valuable insights into processes or policies that require further refinement, and we work collaboratively with AHPRA and the National Boards to ensure that these insights result in meaningful change.’

Richelle highlighted the 2017–18 reporting period as being the office’s busiest year to date. In summary:

* The office received 444 complaints (a 22 per cent increase compared with 2016–17).
* The office received 350 enquiries (a 26 per cent increase compared with 2016–17).
* The office commenced 116 investigations in 2017–18.
  + There was a 46 per cent increase in the number of telephone calls received by the NHPOPC in 2017–18.

In relation to the continued year-on-year increase in the number of complaints received by the NHPOPC, Richelle pointed to the following factors:

* The number of registered health practitioners in Australia continued to increase (23,800 new registrants in 2017–18), meaning that more people are interacting with the National Scheme.
* There was an increase in the number of notifications made about registered health practitioners in 2017–18 (5.5 per cent increase nationally), and people most commonly contact the NHPOPC to complain about the handling of a notification.
  + There is greater public awareness of the role of the NHPOPC, meaning people were more likely to contact the office if they had any concerns about AHPRA and the National Boards.

Some key highlights for the NHPOPC in 2017–18 included:

* The NHPOPC provided formal feedback and suggestions for improvement to AHPRA and the National Boards at the conclusion of 37 investigations (up from only seven in 2016–17).
* The NHPOPC introduced a ’warm transfer’ process to reconnect AHPRA and complainants in circumstances where it was assessed that AHPRA may be able to resolve a concern quickly and effectively.
  + The NHPOPC continued to provide a timely complaint-handling service, in spite of increasing workload pressure. For example, 75 per cent of the complaints received by the office in 2017–18 were closed within 30 days.

Looking forward to the next year, Richelle reflected that her office will need to evolve with the National Scheme to ensure it continues to act as an effective accountability mechanism. The NHPOPC’s key areas of focus in 2018–19 include:

* Managing further anticipated increases in workload, with an estimated 15,000 new registrants entering the National Scheme as paramedicine becomes a regulated profession.
  + Implementing new functions arising from the application of the most up-to-date version of the Commonwealth’s *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, particularly the NHPOPC’s power to conduct a merits review of Freedom of Information decisions.

The NHPOPC annual report can be viewed or downloaded from the NHPOPC website at <https://nhpopc.gov.au/news-publications/> and copies of the report can be requested by contacting the NHPOPC on 1300 795 265.

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