# Media release

29 November 2017

## National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner 2016–17 annual report released

The annual report for the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner (NHPOPC) for 2016–17 has been released and can be accessed on the NHPOPC website: [https://nhpopc.gov.au/news-publications/](mailto:https://nhpopc.gov.au/news-publications/)

The role of the NHPOPC is to provide ombudsman, privacy and freedom of information oversight of the 15 National Boards and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (the National Law).[[1]](#footnote-1)

The NHPOPC acts independently in the interests of public health and safety. The NHPOPC examines the administrative actions of AHPRA and the National Boards to ensure they were lawful and reasonable, have complied with relevant policies and procedures, and have taken into account all relevant considerations.

Acting NHPOPC Richelle McCausland highlighted the 2016–17 reporting period as being a dynamic one that saw a doubling in the number of complaints received and significant improvements in complaints handling processes by both AHPRA and the NHPOPC.

“The 2016–17 reporting period has been one of dynamic change with a number of positive developments for both members of the public and practitioners. The reasons for the increase in the number of approaches to the office are similar to those that contributed to increased approaches and complaints during the previous year, including:

* year-on-year increases in the number of notifications made to AHPRA (a 13.9 per cent increase in 2016–17), resulting in an increased number of people approaching the NHPOPC to complain about the way a notification had been handled by AHPRA and the National Boards
* an increase in the number of registrants (21,000 more registrants compared to 2015–16) which means that there are more health practitioners interacting with AHPRA and the National Boards
* greater public awareness of the NHPOPC’s services, due to the work that has been undertaken to increase the office’s profile and make its services more accessible to the public and health practitioners
  + several high-profile investigations in a number of states that have brought issues relating to health practitioner regulation to the attention of the media and the public.”

Some key highlights for the NHPOPC in 2016–17 included:

* improved reporting of complaints to AHPRA and the National Boards, as well as to the public
* providing secretariat support to the independent review of the use of chaperones to protect patients in Australia, conducted by Professor Ron Paterson
* providing advice in relation to proposed legislative amendments to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law
  + participating in Senate inquiries into health practitioner regulation.

The NHPOPC continued to deal with complaints in a prompt manner, in spite of a doubling in complaints made to the office. In summary:

* The office received 363 complaints and 85 per cent (307) of these complaints were closed in the reporting period.
* The office received 277 inquiries.
  + 70 per cent of complaints received by the office were closed within 30 days and 88 per cent were closed within 60 days.

Ms McCausland paid tribute to outgoing NHPOPC Samantha Gavel who took up the position of new full-time New South Wales Privacy Commissioner in September 2017.

“Ms Gavel’s appointment as the NHPOPC in November 2014 marked a period of great change for the office. Her deep knowledge and understanding of Australia’s health system and significant experience in complaints handling and ombudsman work saw the implementation of extensive improvements in the complaints handling processes utilised by the office. These improvements have played a significant role in enabling the office to handle its dramatically increased workload while at the same time enabling it to continue to meet its’ service charter aims.”

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.

**Further enquiries should be emailed to:** [media@nhpopc.gov.au](mailto:media@nhpopc.gov.au)

1. In the 2016–17 reporting period, the NHPOPC had oversight of 14 National Boards. Recent amendments to the National Law enabled the establishment of the Paramedicine Board of Australia (Board members were appointed by Health Ministers on 19 October 2017). The registration of paramedics is due to commence in late 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)