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| Safeguarding confidentiality review update |
| 27 May 2021 |

The National Health Practitioner Ombudsman (NHPO) welcomes progress on the implementation of all recommendations from her review into [safeguarding the confidentiality of people making notifications about registered health practitioners](https://www.nhpo.gov.au/safeguarding-confidentiality-review).

Today the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Health Practitioner Boards (the Boards) announced that all the Ombudsman’s recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.

“I am pleased that Ahpra and the Boards have taken significant steps to strengthen and communicate the safeguards available to those who make a notification,” said Ombudsman and Commissioner Richelle McCausland.

“It’s essential that people feel safe to notify Ahpra and the Boards if they are concerned that a practitioner’s health, conduct or performance is putting the public at risk. Health practitioners also need to have confidence that they will be treated fairly if a notification is made about them.”

Several significant areas of progress include Ahpra and the Boards:

* updating relevant policies to reflect that possible confidentiality safeguards for the notifier will be considered when assessing each new notification
* publishing an updated privacy policy and collection statement to clarify how personal information will be used and disclosed (particularly in relation to confidential and anonymous notifications)
* providing new guidance to staff about how to safeguard confidentiality, including in relation to redacting a notifier’s information and sharing a notifier’s information with the relevant practitioner.

The Ombudsman and Commissioner said that the publication of a new framework for handling vexatious notifications is a significant step forward for the National Scheme.

“Our complaints data suggests that it is rare that a notification is truly vexatious, meaning it is groundless and made with the intent to cause distress. However, we know that responding to notifications can be very stressful for health practitioners and this framework clarifies how Ahpra and the Boards will identify and handle vexatious notifications if they do occur,” said Ms McCausland.

Ahpra is awaiting further advice from Health Ministers regarding the recommended amendment to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to make it an offence for a registered health practitioner to harm, threaten, intimidate, harass, or coerce a notifier.

The Ombudsman and Commissioner said she is satisfied with Ahpra and the Boards’ progress and that her office has welcomed continued involvement and consultation following the review.

“I will continue to monitor issues related to confidentiality safeguards for notifiers. I encourage notifiers or practitioners to contact Ahpra to discuss any concerns and to reach out to my office about any unresolved issues,” said Ms McCausland.

**Contact the NHPO**

Complaints line: 1300 795 265

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