



National Health
Practitioner
Ombudsman

Submission

Public consultation on the proposal to regulate
advanced practice paramedics

2 June 2025

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Authorised and published by the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman,
50 Lonsdale St, Melbourne.

GPO Box 2630

Melbourne VIC 3001

Phone 1300 795 265

[Email National Health Practitioner Ombudsman](mailto:complaints@nhpo.gov.au) <complaints@nhpo.gov.au>

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Submission

The office of the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman (NHPO) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the public consultation on the proposed:

- Registration standard: Endorsement for an area of practice (advanced practice paramedicine) and endorsement for scheduled medicines (the proposed registration standard)
- Professional capabilities for advanced practice paramedics (including use of scheduled medicines) (the proposed professional capabilities).

Ensuring responsive, fair and transparent health practitioner registration

The NHPO champions fairness by taking every complaint seriously and shining a light on systemic issues to effect positive change. Its vision is for a healthy regulatory system that makes fair and just decisions.

The office's primary role is to provide oversight of bodies in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (National Scheme), including the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), the National Health Practitioner Boards (the National Boards), accreditation authorities and specialist medical colleges. The office accepts:

- complaints to the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)
- privacy complaints to the National Health Practitioner Privacy Commissioner (the Commissioner)
- applications for a review of Ahpra's Freedom of Information (FOI) decisions.

Identifying and addressing potential areas of administrative concern

The NHPO appreciates Ahpra and the Paramedicine Board of Australia (the Board)'s comprehensive consultation process for the proposed registration standard and professional capabilities. The NHPO previously made a submission to the Board during its preliminary consultation and it acknowledges the Board's responsiveness to its feedback. This includes the Board:

- providing further information and explanation on the distinction between extended practice and advanced practice paramedics and why the Board is seeking to endorse advanced practice paramedics, when it did not seek to endorse extended practice paramedics
- outlining its intention to develop accreditation standards for programs of study relating to advanced practice paramedics, including a framework for assessing international qualifications that are 'substantially equivalent' or based on similar competencies to Australian qualifications
- clarifying that paramedics currently operating within the scope of an advanced practice paramedic will not be 'grandparented' into an endorsement. These paramedics will need to demonstrate they meet the proposed registration standard, however, they may apply to have their qualification assessment prioritised

- noting its Continuing professional development registration standard will need to be updated to align with the proposed registration standard
- providing further information on what applicants should include in their portfolio when applying for endorsement, and what factors the Board will consider during the portfolio assessment
- reviewing the proposed professional capabilities to consider whether obligations for advanced practice paramedics to lead research and be a spokesperson or advocate for the profession are appropriate professional capabilities.

The NHPO has provided further feedback about potential new and continuing administrative concerns in response to this current consultation.

Clarifying supervised practice requirements

The NHPO is concerned that the supervision requirements for newly-endorsed advanced practice paramedics outlined in the proposed registration standard make it unclear whether supervision is a mandatory requirement for endorsement.

The proposed registration standard outlines that all advanced practice paramedics are required to complete a period of supervision after they have been granted endorsement. This period of supervision will be imposed as a condition on endorsement under s. 103 of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law* (the National Law). Successful completion of supervision will lead to the practitioner being granted unconditional endorsement.

Although the proposed registration standard seems to state that supervision is a mandatory requirement, this seemingly conflicts with information in the consultation paper. The consultation paper proposes that the period of supervision will be up to a maximum of 3,400 hours. The consultation paper outlines that the duration, level, transition through levels and reporting frequency of supervision will be determined on an individual basis. There is no minimum period of supervision outlined. This raises a question of whether it would be permissible for the Board to decide that an advanced practice paramedic does not need to complete any hours of supervision before being granted unconditional endorsement. If so, there appears to be no requirement for all advanced practice paramedics to undergo supervision.

The Board should consider clarifying whether post-endorsement supervision is required for all advanced practice paramedics. If the Board does intend for all advanced practice paramedics to be supervised, it should outline the minimum supervision requirements in the proposed registration standard and consider whether s. 99(3)(b) is a more suitable legislative basis for the requirement. This section of the National Law frames supervision as a requirement for all practitioners to complete before obtaining endorsement. The current reference to s. 103, however, frames supervision as a condition the Board has discretion to impose on certain practitioners after they have obtained endorsement.

Clarifying whether the Board can exempt practitioners from meeting the proposed registration standard

The proposed registration standard leaves some ambiguity on whether it allows exemptions for applicants who do not meet all the requirements. The proposed registration standard states: “if you don’t meet this standard... the Board can impose conditions on your endorsement under section 103 of the National Law.” This statement suggests that an applicant can be endorsed with conditions, even if they do not meet the requirements of the registration standard.

This implication that the Board can grant exemptions from meeting the requirements of the registration standard is not reflected elsewhere in the proposed registration standard or consultation paper. It is important that the proposed registration standard explicitly specifies whether a paramedic (whether previously endorsed or seeking endorsement for the first time) may receive an exemption from meeting the proposed registration standard.

If the Board does not intend to permit exemptions from satisfying the registration standard, this should be clearly stated. However, if the Board does intend to permit exemptions, there are further questions that need to be addressed. This includes, for example, clarifying:

- the factors the Board will consider when deciding if it is appropriate to grant an exemption
- any additional requirements or conditions that may be placed on an applicant who is granted an exemption.

Outlining these factors and any additional requirements will ensure greater transparency regarding the Board’s decision-making framework when deciding to endorse a paramedic who does not meet the proposed registration standard. This will provide greater clarity to potential applicants and those reapplying for endorsement, as well as supporting greater consistency in decision-making.

Ensuring the proposed registration standard is evidence-informed

In the preliminary consultation, the NHPO raised concerns about there being no clear rationale for the proposed registration standard’s:

- practice hour requirement (3 years full-time, equivalent to 5,000 hours) in a direct patient care role in the past 10 years
- requirement to complete a period of supervision at an advanced practice level (originally a minimum of 1,700 hours, now a maximum of 3,400 hours).

The NHPO expressed concern in the preliminary consultation that there was no clear reason why these numbers of hours were considered accurate measures of competency.

There have been no changes to the proposed registration standard to outline specific evidence used to determine these benchmarks.

The NHPO has found that if there is a clearly provided reason for requirements that a National Board has decided on, applicants are more likely to accept the need to meet these requirements. As such,

the NHPO reiterates its suggestion that the Board should seek to ensure there is a publicly articulated, and ideally evidence-informed, rationale for these requirements.

The NHPO recognises the complexities associated with ensuring there is an evidence-informed rationale for new areas of regulation. The NHPO also acknowledges there may be a lack of literature or information from comparable jurisdictions to be able to form a clear, evidence-informed rationale for these decisions. In these circumstances, the NHPO suggests that the Board considers developing an implementation and monitoring plan to determine if the requirements it has set are working as intended. For example, this could include setting an earlier review date for the proposed registration standard to further consult on the changes and analyse notifications data and any tribunal decisions where the registration standard was relevant.

Clarifying documentation requirements for applying for endorsement

Clarifying the purpose of the portfolio assessment

The proposed registration standard has left some ambiguity about the purpose of the applicant's portfolio when applying for endorsement. In preliminary consultation, the proposed registration standard suggested the purpose of the portfolio was to evidence the applicant's hours of practice in a direct patient care role within the last 10 years. The NHPO provided feedback on this and appreciates that the Board's updated consultation paper provides further clarification on what applicants should provide in their portfolio.

However, the items of information the Board has proposed including create some confusion about the purpose of the portfolio. It appears that the information sought goes beyond providing evidence of meeting the specified practice hours. For example, the Board suggests applicants may include letters of support and evidence of clinical competency in their portfolio. Inclusion of these document types implies the Board is seeking information through the portfolio which demonstrates the applicant's capabilities, rather than solely their hours of practice experience. As such, there is uncertainty in the proposed registration standard about what the Board is assessing when considering an applicant's portfolio.

The NHPO considers it would be beneficial to applicants and the Board if the purpose of the portfolio assessment was clearly outlined. If the Board expects applicants to prove they are performing at a certain level, or with a certain degree of proficiency, this should be stated in the registration standard. If the portfolio is only intended to evidence practice hours in a particular setting, this should be similarly clarified.

Compliance with setting an individual scope of practice

The proposed registration standard requires endorsed advanced practice paramedics to maintain "an individual scope of practice document for the context of practice, reflective of education, skills, knowledge and competence, and aligned with legislation for the state or territory of practice." It is unclear whether the Board will consider this document when deciding to endorse a paramedic, or whether, for example, a paramedic is required to hold this document in case the Board requests it at

another time. The NHPO considers it would be beneficial for the Board to clarify this in the proposed registration standard.

The NHPO further notes that the reference to a 'scope of practice document' in a registration standard outlining requirements for endorsement appears to be a new approach. The registration standards for other types of practitioner endorsements, such as the Endorsement of registration of registered medical practitioners for the approved area of cosmetic surgery (cosmetic surgery endorsement) or the Endorsement as a nurse practitioner, do not contain reference to this type of document. As the Board recognises in its description of the scope of practice document, the NHPO understands that employers across Australia may have different ways of ensuring individuals work within their scope of practice, which could be outlined in a range of different ways (such as in position descriptions or contracts for services), and may differ based on the type of health service and/or location of the health service. Given the proposed registration standard appears to introduce a new type of documentation practitioners are required to maintain, the NHPO suggests that the Board considers consulting with the other National Boards, and other relevant stakeholders, to review the appropriateness of requiring health practitioners to maintain such a document, and if so, whether a similar documentary requirement should also be further considered by other professions.

Ensuring appropriate transitional arrangements

The NHPO acknowledges that the proposed registration standard outlines that paramedics currently operating within the scope of an advanced practice paramedic will not be eligible for endorsement under a 'grandparenting' arrangement. These paramedics will need to demonstrate they meet the proposed registration standard, but they may apply to have their qualification assessment prioritised.

The NHPO suggests that further consideration is given to how the endorsement will operate in practice if there is not an obligation for practitioners already working in the role of an 'advanced practice paramedic' to successfully gain endorsement or successfully gain endorsement by a future date. The consultation paper suggests that there is a need for regulation of this cohort of practitioners – it is the reason the endorsement has been proposed. Subsequently, it is challenging to see why an endorsement is necessary if practitioners can continue to work within this scope without meeting the requirements for endorsement. It appears that further engagement with relevant health services is necessary to consider how an endorsement would be implemented, including to determine how existing credentialing processes may intersect with the endorsement proposal.

It is also challenging to see how the Board will consider applications for endorsement where a paramedic holds a qualification that is substantially equivalent to an approved qualification when the Board has not approved any qualifications as leading to eligibility for endorsement as an advanced practice paramedic. It is difficult to see how the Board will grant endorsements to practitioners without first approving at least one program of study. In the case of the cosmetic surgery endorsement, for example, the Medical Board has not yet approved a program of study as leading to a qualification that makes the applicant eligible for the endorsement, although the registration standard came into effect on 1 July 2023. This suggests that there is a need for the Board to prioritise consideration of the development of accreditation standards, and ideally an audit of existing

programs of study which could be prioritised for assessment, to determine appropriate transitional arrangements.

In contrast to the Board's approach, the Podiatry Board of Australia is currently consulting on its proposed approach to strengthen the regulation of podiatric surgeons. It has proposed transitional arrangements for the requirement for podiatric surgeons to gain an endorsement for scheduled medicines. This includes, for example, proposing to require current podiatric surgeons to obtain the endorsement by 1 December 2028. It also proposes that podiatrists will need to hold endorsement for scheduled medicines before starting podiatric surgery education and training.

Consequently, the NHPO suggests that there is a need for the Board to further consider how the introduction of a new endorsement will affect those currently working in the scope of an advanced practice paramedic. If the Board is seeking for practitioners currently working in the scope of practice of an advanced practice paramedic to gain endorsement, this requirement needs to be outlined in the proposed registration standard. A transitional plan outlining these arrangements would likely assist the Board to address these issues, and others identified through this consultation process.

Contact details

The NHPO has welcomed the opportunity to provide this feedback on the public consultation on the proposal to regulate advanced practice paramedics.

Please feel free to contact the NHPO for further information about this response.

E: admin@nhpo.gov.au

P: 1300 795 265