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Victorian Community Members COAG
Reference Group
C/- Psychologists Registration Board of Victoria
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Dear Dr Morauta

RE: Proposed Comments on Bill B by Community Members of Victorian Health Professions Registration Boards (HPRB).

Background:

Community members of HPRBs in Victoria approach the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Health Professions from the fundamental principle that the protection of the public is of paramount importance. As such community members believe:

1. The public should have absolute confidence in the integrity, credibility and fairness of the proposed structures.
2. The public should have confidence that the national processes are transparent and that all participants and structures are able to be held accountable.
3. The public should be assured that all aspects of the national scheme are conveniently accessible, and that outcomes and decisions are subject to review.
4. In particular the public should feel confident that complaints are dealt with in a timely manner with open and accessible processes and that the outcomes and reasons for those outcomes are made public; further, that there is a process which enables dis-satisfied complainants to seek a review of decisions and/or processes.

Community members believe that the attainment of these basic principles will not in any way imperil the achievement of a truly national professional structure for the health industry or diminish the standing of the professions to be regulated. On the contrary we believe they will enhance public understanding and support for the processes thus protecting the status of the professions so regulated.

The Public Interest:

Community members strongly assert that the best way of achieving such public support and understanding is to ensure that truly independent persons whose prime purpose is to represent the public interest should be an integral and substantial part of the regulatory processes at every level. This is particularly the case in the complaints process where it is vital that the professions are not seen as regulating themselves.

Accordingly we seek support for significant representation of non-practitioners at all levels of the complaints processes. Indeed we would submit that there is no reason why non-practitioners could not be appointed to leadership positions on many of the proposed structures and bodies at both national and state levels.

The Public Interest Assessor:

Community members are extremely concerned about this proposed office. We are not convinced that such an office will in any way add value to the national processes. Indeed we are concerned that:

- It may reduce clarity and lead to confusion about the processes and respective responsibilities around national and state arrangements.
- It may lead to costly and distressing time delays as responsibilities for aspects of complaints are sorted out. It may even have the unintended consequence of putting the public at risk.
- It may reduce transparency and accountability as well as accessibility from the perspective of ordinary members of the public.
- It will make review of decisions and/or processes more complicated than they need to be.
- It appears to duplicate what already happens in the Victorian jurisdiction where there are roles for the Health Services Commissioner, boards and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Suggestion:

As outlined above community members assert that such an office is unnecessary and carries an implication that boards cannot be trusted to carry out their responsibilities. We suggest that the following would achieve a better outcome while maintaining community trust and support as outlined above:

- A significant number of non-practitioner (community) members be appointed to each board.
- That any appointments of legally qualified persons not be counted as non-practitioner (community) members.
- That it be possible for non-practitioners (community members) to chair boards.
- That complainants have the right to appeal decisions and processes. We believe the Victorian Independent Review Panel is a sound model (provided non-practitioner members sit on appeals as outlined above).
- To further enhance the national structures that relevant training is offered to community members to assist them in carrying out their roles.
- We believe the power of boards to suspend practitioners (particularly in emergency situations) needs to be clarified and made explicit in the complaints section of the Bill.

Yours sincerely



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for

Patricia Mehegan Community Member, Psychologists Registration Board of Victoria

Peter Martin Community Member, Dental Practice Board of Victoria

On behalf of

Victorian HPRB Community Members COAG Reference Group