

UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION, DECEMBER 2008

In March 2008 COAG decided to create a single national scheme for the registration and accreditation of health practitioners from 1 July 2010.

This agreement will for the first time create a single national registration and accreditation system for ten health professions: chiropractors; dentists (including dental hygienists, dental prosthetists and dental therapists); medical practitioners; nurses and midwives; optometrists; osteopaths; pharmacists; physiotherapists; podiatrists; and psychologists. The new arrangement will help health professionals move around the country more easily, reduce red tape, provide greater safeguards for the public and promote a more flexible, responsive and sustainable health workforce. For example, the new scheme will maintain a public national register for each health profession that will ensure that a professional who has been banned from practising in one place is unable to practise elsewhere in Australia.

COAG has passed responsibility for the implementation of this decision to Health Ministers. A number of steps have been taken towards the implementation of this decision.

An implementation team has been funded by governments and set up from May 2008 to support the decision-making of governments. Dr Louise Morauta, formerly of the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Canberra, has been appointed to head the implementation team for the first 12 months. Staff are located in Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. Staff are in two teams, Policy and Legislation, headed by Chris Robertson, and Implementation, headed by Del Stitz.

Ministers have emphasised the importance of working with the health sector, the professions and the boards to implement the scheme. In the period August to September 2008, Ministers held a **national forum and a forum in each State and Territory** as the beginning of the consultation process. Three other forums have since been held. Around 1,050 people have attended forums around the country.

A consultation paper on the first step in the legislative program to set up the scheme was issued in August and over 40 submissions received. Ministers decided to make amendments before they agreed to the first piece of legislation for the new scheme. This legislation, entitled the ***Health Practitioner Regulation (Administrative Arrangements) National Law Bill 2008***, was passed in the Queensland Parliament in November 2008 and received Royal Assent on 25 November 2008.

Ministers have committed, in a statement issued in September 2008, to an extensive **consultation process for the major piece of national legislation** to underpin the scheme. There are two stages to this process. Five public consultation papers have been issued on the subject matter of this Bill, and at the time of writing over 200 submissions had been received in response to the first two of these papers. Once Ministers have considered the submissions, an exposure draft of the legislation will be issued in 2009 for public comment and forums led by Ministers will again be held around the country.

In terms of the non-legislative aspects of implementation, a number of steps have been taken. Positions on the new **Agency Management Committee** have been advertised and an announcement is expected in time for the new committee to commence work in February 2009. Preparations are in hand to advertise positions on the ten new **national boards** in February 2009 for a commencement date of July 2009.

Transition coordinators have been funded in each State and Territory to assist with transition from the existing boards to the new scheme. Transition coordination groups have commenced meeting regularly in each jurisdiction. A proposed **staffing strategy** has been developed by governments and at the time of writing is subject to consultation with the ACTU and board staff.

In relation to **information systems**, a business process design contract has been let and work is underway with existing boards to scope the business processes for the new system. A contract has also been let for the development of an ICT strategy, enterprise architecture and the development of a business case for the new IT system.

Important features of the implementation process to date have been the strong collaboration between officials across jurisdictions and the outstanding level of interest, engagement and contribution from the professions, consumers and existing boards. A very large number of people have helped make the progress achieved to date possible.

Further information on the scheme can be found at www.nhwt.gov.au/natreg.asp.

Dr Louise Morauta
Project Director
National Registration and Accreditation Implementation Project
December 2008