



Health Ministers Meeting (HMM): *Communique* 24 February 2023

Health Ministers from all Australian governments met in Brisbane today to discuss a range of important issues, including: reports of professional misconduct (boundary violations) by registered health practitioners, cosmetic surgery reform, tobacco control and e-cigarettes, mid-term review of the National Health Reform Agreement, and the establishment of an Australian Centre for Disease Control.

Responding to reports of misconduct and boundary violations

Ministers agree that reports of professional misconduct relating to sexual boundary violations, and the ongoing registration of practitioners who have been found to have committed offences is of great concern and requires a strong and urgent response.

Ministers will take urgent action to ensure:

- that there is transparency for patients around a practitioner's regulatory history;
- practitioners are subject to a high bar to return to practice; and
- there is community participation in decision-making to balance practitioner membership.

Ministers also agreed to a rapid review of Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) to understand the extent to which action has been taken in response to previous reviews including on the management of professional misconduct relating to boundary violations under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. Health Ministers are committed to ensuring all patients are safe and protected when receiving care.

Update on the progress of reforms to the cosmetic surgery industry

Significant progress continues to be made on reforming the cosmetic surgery industry, following work endorsed by Ministers in December to ensure the title of 'surgeon' is used only by doctors who have the appropriate training. At today's meeting Ministers:

- Approved the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023* and Explanatory Memorandum;
- Approved the Registration Standard: Endorsement of registration for cosmetic surgery for registered medical practitioners; and
- Agreed the implementation timeline for this important work, including the delivery for a public awareness campaign.

Mid-Term Review of the National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) Addendum 2020-25

Health Ministers welcomed the two independent reviewers they have appointed to conduct the mid-term review of the NHRA, Ms. Rosemary Huxtable and Mr. Michael Walsh. Ms Huxtable and Mr

Walsh both have long experience at the most senior levels of public service and are highly respected in the fields of health and public policy. Ms Huxtable is the former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Finance and Mr Walsh is a former Director-General of Queensland Health.

The independent reviewers provided advice on the approach to the commencement of stakeholder consultations for the mid-term review, which was agreed by the Health Ministers. The Review will complement other work between Health Ministers to make it easier for Australians to access healthcare and to relieve pressure on our public hospitals.

Tobacco control and e-cigarettes

Health Ministers are pleased to announce that today they endorsed the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030. The Strategy includes targets to reduce daily smoking prevalence in Australia to below 10% by 2025 and to 5% or less by 2030. The strategy prioritises addressing smoking among First Nations people and the importance of Closing the Gap. The strategy also includes a number of actions to address e-cigarettes. To support action related to e-cigarettes and vaping, Ministers also agreed to establish a national E-cigarette Working Group aimed at reviewing and advising on measures to protect young people from the harms of e-cigarettes by addressing the increasing availability, appeal, and uptake of vaping products.

Primary Care

Health Ministers discussed the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce report and its recommendations. Ministers agreed to work collaboratively to address the recommendations and to deliver a more integrated, patient-centred health system. This work includes the implementation of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics across all states and territories and the implementation of primary care pilots, including the single-employer model recently announced by the Tasmanian and Commonwealth governments.

Establishing an Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC)

Health Ministers discussed the establishment of an Australian CDC. At the end of 2022 the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care completed targeted consultation on the design and scope of the CDC. Central to the CDC will be a National Communicable Disease and Surveillance Outbreak Response System, which Health Ministers have agreed to collaboratively develop.

Bone Marrow

Health Ministers approved immediate release of \$1 million from the Cord Blood Export Revenue fund to increase bone marrow donation recruitment, through both blood testing and cheek swabbing. Proposals for scaling bone marrow donation recruitment nationally are currently being considered. Health Ministers gave provisional approval for the release of further funds from the Cord Blood Export Revenue fund with details to be finalised following clinical advice, due in April 2023.

Other briefings

Ministers received briefings from Minister Wells on the National Dementia Action Plan and aged care, and from Prof Paul Kelly CMO on the current COVID-19 situation in Australia.

Retirement of Minister Hazzard

This was NSW Health Minister, the Honourable Brad Hazzard's final Health Ministers Meeting. Ministers thanked Minister Hazzard for his service, support and collegiality, particularly as all Health Ministers had to respond to the COVID pandemic over the last several years. Ministers wished Minister Hazzard well in retirement following the NSW state election.