



audiology australia ltd

Issues Paper

**Regulation, registration and
Audiology Australia's role**

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Where does audiology fit in the health profession regulation space?

There are currently two types of regulation of health professions that are recognised by the Australian Government:

1. Regulation under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) through registration with an Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) Board.
2. Regulation through clinical certification by a professional body that implements a “self-regulatory” model (i.e. non-Government regulated).

Audiology Australia takes responsibility for ensuring that the highest standard of self-regulation is met for audiologists. In this Issues Paper we describe how Audiology Australia implements a self-regulatory model that is equivalent to an AHPRA Board’s registration model. We then discuss some common misunderstandings regarding the current regulatory space.

Audiology Australia implements a self-regulation model that meets rigorous standards

Audiology Australia is striving towards meeting the rigorous standards required for membership in the National Alliance of Self-Regulating Health Professions (NASRHP). The NASRHP standards were developed to provide the highest professional standards of practice. NASRHP continues to advocate for its self-regulatory model to be recognised in national law. It made progress in recognising this goal earlier this year when it received funding from the Australian Government Department of Health to establish itself as an organisation to support self-regulating professions with regulatory standards comparable to registered professions.

The NASRHP standards define the criteria that must be met for the following regulatory requirements:

- Scope of Practice
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Procedure
- Mandatory Declarations
- Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Competency Standards
- Practitioner Certification
- Course Accreditation
- Recency and Resumption of Practice
- English Language
- Continuing Professional Development

The NASRHP standards are comparable to the rigorous registration standards of the AHRPA Boards (1). Audiology Australia has made significant progress towards meeting these standards in the past year, and aims to fully comply with these standards by June 2017.

Audiology Australia aims to meet the NASRHP standards by June 2017. These standards are equivalent to those of the registered professions.

Clarification of some common misunderstandings

The profession of audiology does not meet the criteria for regulation via an AHPRA Board

Whether or not a profession is eligible for regulation under the NRAS is determined by the “Criteria for assessing the need for statutory regulation of unregulated health occupations” (see Attachment B in reference (2)). A profession must meet ALL six criteria to be considered for registration. As can be seen in the table below, the profession of audiology clearly does not meet all six criteria. The Australian Government Department of Health regularly reminds Audiology Australia that audiology is not eligible for regulation under the NRAS.

Criteria for assessing the need for statutory regulation of unregulated health occupations	Does audiology meet the criterion?
Criterion 1- Is it appropriate for Health Ministers to exercise responsibility for regulating the occupation in question, or does the occupation more appropriately fall within the domain of another Ministry?	Yes- Audiology is considered a health profession.
Criterion 2- Do the activities of the occupation pose a significant risk of harm to the health and safety of the public?	No- We have been advised that audiology is considered a 'low-risk' profession in this context. Epidemiological or other data is the basis for determining the demonstration of risk/harm. For example, it is only following two coronial inquests in South Australia that the inclusion of social work in the NRAS was considered by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (3).

Criteria for assessing the need for statutory regulation of unregulated health occupations

Does audiology meet the criterion?

Criterion 3- Do existing regulatory or other mechanisms fail to address health and safety issues?

Unlikely- As a member of NASRHP, Audiology Australia would likely be deemed to be providing sufficient self-regulation for the profession.

Criterion 4- Is regulation possible to implement for the occupation in question?

Yes- Audiology is a well-defined profession with a clear scope of practice, standards of practice, and education requirements.

Criterion 5- Is regulation practical to implement for the occupation in question?

Unlikely- In his review of the NRAS, Kim Snowball reported that the unit cost per registrant varied between \$162 and \$1,792 and that there was a relationship between the cost per registrant and the size of the profession (4). In addition to this cost is the fees individuals pay to be a member of a professional body. That is, the cost of registration per audiologist would be prohibitively high due to the small number of audiologists in Australia.

Criterion 6- Do the benefits to the public of regulation clearly outweigh the potential negative impact of such regulation?

Unlikely- As stated in response to criterion 2, audiology is considered a 'low-risk' profession. In addition, the prohibitive costs of registration would be considered a negative impact on the profession.

People cannot claim to be an audiologist if they do not possess the relevant qualifications

Audiology Australia's Code of Conduct enacted on the 1st of July this year is in line with the National Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers (The National Code) which is currently being enacted in all of the States and Territories. The National Code prohibits health care workers, defined as any person who provides a health service, from misrepresenting their qualifications. As stated in subclause 9.1:

"A health care worker must not engage in any form of misinformation or misrepresentation in relation to the products or services he or she provides or the qualifications, training or professional affiliations he or she holds"

Furthermore, Audiology Australia's introduction of the "Audiology Australia Accredited Audiologist" trade mark and the publicly available list of all Accredited Audiologists provides an additional avenue for the public to be assured that the audiologist they are seeing possesses the relevant qualifications, meets the requirements of their professional body, and does not have any sanctions against them.

You cannot be discriminated against because your profession is not regulated by an AHPRA Board

The Australian Government recognises self-regulating health professions and those health professions that are regulated by an AHPRA Board equally. Furthermore, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council has explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of whether or not a profession is regulated by an AHPRA Board (5).

The fact that the Government recognises self-regulating professions such as ours is evidenced by the fact that membership with Audiology Australia is sufficient to provide government-funded audiological services such as via the:

- Office of Hearing Services Hearing Services Programme;
- Medicare;
- The NDIA;
- State and Territory workers' compensation schemes (such as Workcover); and
- The Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Additionally, private healthcare funds also require that the audiologist is a member of Audiology Australia in order for the fee to be reimbursed. Audiology Australia is routinely contacted by these organisations to confirm membership and CCP status of our members.

What to do if you feel you are being discriminated against because your profession is not regulated by an AHPRA Board

If you feel you are being discriminated against because your profession is not regulated by an AHPRA Board you should contact Audiology Australia.

In the past, we have had members contact us with concerns that they have been discriminated against because their profession is not regulated by an AHPRA Board. In all cases, Audiology Australia has escalated these concerns to the Allied Health Advisor at the Australian Government Department of Health and/or the COAG Health Council. The Allied Health Advisor has taken these incidents seriously and if they related to government organisations, or organisations funded by the government, they have sought to rectify the issue.

In addition, Audiology Australia is happy to contact any person or organisation you feel does not understand the nature of your professional title and the weight that is placed on being a member of an allied health professional body. In our experience, we are often able to quell any concerns or confusion by providing information about our organisation.

References

1. Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council. 1 April 2010- AHWMC Communique. Health Ministers announce approval of national health practitioner registration standards. 2010.
2. Commonwealth of Australia. Intergovernmental Agreement for a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the Health Professions. 2008.
3. COAG Health Council. Communique 8 April 2016.
4. Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. Final Report- Independent Review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professions. 2014 Dec.
5. COAG Health Council. Communique- The Independent Review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Health Professionals. 2015 Aug.