



SHPA submission to the Interim Report on the Independent Review of Overseas Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional organisation for the 6,100+ Hospital Pharmacists, and their Hospital Pharmacist Intern and Hospital Pharmacy Technician colleagues working across Australia's health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

SHPA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Interim Report on the *Independent review of overseas health practitioner regulatory settings* delivered by Independent Reviewer, Robyn Kruk AO in April 2023. SHPA supports expedited and efficient pathways for overseas applications from similar regulatory systems to ensure our workforce is able to facilitate safe and quality use of medicines whenever and wherever needed.

A well-resourced workforce is an enabler to achieving the [National Medicines Policy \(NMP\)](#) and providing well-coordinated, integrated and person-centred care.¹ Whilst there is a National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021–2031, no such national strategy exists for pharmacists. SHPA therefore, supports the recommendation to the Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC) to work with state and territories and relevant stakeholders, to address gaps in allied health workforce data to facilitate supply and demand modelling in the future.

SHPA recommends that the Australian government commission a ten-year National Pharmacy Workforce Plan to support pharmacy workforce sustainability. The National Skills Commission's 2022 [Skills Priority List](#) found shortages in all states and territories across both pharmacist occupation categories, sharpening focus on the urgent need for a national strategy to meet the immediate and future healthcare needs of the Australian community. The last comprehensive Pharmacy Workforce Planning² study was undertaken within Community Pharmacy Agreements in 2008. Since then, Health Workforce Australia released *Australia's Health Workforce Series – Pharmacists in Focus*³ which showed that pharmacists have a relatively young workforce which may reflect difficulty in sustaining or growing an experienced workforce where some recent indications have seen student uptake of pharmacy courses declining significantly in some states leading to some pharmacy schools closing.

SHPA is well-placed to work with other pharmacy and health bodies to progress a workforce study as we have a unique understanding of both the diversity of practice and the emergence of highly specialised roles in hospitals. Previous statistics have shown that despite there being an overall increase in the number of pharmacists, 50% of the national growth has been in new roles within the hospital sector. More clarity is required around the projected needs and growth for pharmacy and hospital pharmacy particularly in light of the expansion and dependence of hospital pharmacy services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SHPA is however, concerned with the recommendation that the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards deliver a streamlined end-to-end registration system for overseas trained pharmacists, as this is already occurring in the pharmacy sector through the Australian Pharmacy Council (APC).

The APC is the national accreditation authority for pharmacy education and training and relies on 40 years of experience. APC connects with and provides support to candidates via a range of modalities to provide an end-to-end, personalised applicant experience that can process eligibility assessments in four weeks, issuing



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outcome letters in real-time immediately after exam results are released. They have managed a four-time increase in candidate applications with their existing process over the past nine months.

Ahpra already has a significant workload with processing provisional pharmacy registrations. Expecting them to take on more work that is currently being managed in a smooth and robust manner by another body, will increase pressure on Ahpra, duplicate existing work, slow down the registration process for overseas pharmacists and ultimately impact on the pharmacy workforce in Australia and the Australian public.

SHPA supports a streamlined process to enable the smooth Australian registration of emigrating pharmacists and recommends that APC establishes a data transfer capability to Ahpra. We understand that APC has a long-established CRM and candidate portal since 2015. Sharing data with Ahpra will reduce duplication and support them in processing provisional registration in an efficient manner.

SHPA also supports the fast-tracking of pharmacists who are registered and competent from other countries with similar regulatory systems and recommends that the APC puts additional policies in place to add to the four countries currently in their Competency Stream.

Fundamentally, the pharmacy workforce in Australia is a cornerstone of the health system facilitating the safe and quality use of medicines when and where they are needed. Measures to better understand the current pharmacy landscape and to futureproof this workforce, whilst also maintaining a steady supply of overseas trained pharmacists, will deliver safe, quality and efficient healthcare to all Australians.

References

¹ The Australian Government, Department of Health. (2022) National Medicines Policy, Available at: www.health.gov.au/nationalmedicinespolicy

²Sixth Community Pharmacy Agreement. (2008). Pharmacy Workforce Planning. Available at: <http://6cpa.com.au/resources/fourth-agreement/pharmacy-workforce-planning/>; Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. Medicine Safety: Take Care. Canberra: PSA; 2019.

³ Health Workforce Australia. (2014) Australia's Health Workforce Series – Pharmacists in Focus. Available at: http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/133228/20150419-0017/www.hwa.gov.au/sites/default/files/HWA_Australia-Health-Workforce-Series_Pharmacists%20in%20focus_vF_LR.pdf.

