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| Media release |
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**Unusual complaint trends due to COVID-19 seen by National Health Practitioner Ombudsman during 10-year anniversary of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme**

The office of the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman (NHPO)’s annual report paints a unique picture of how the COVID–19 pandemic has affected health practitioner regulation in Australia.

The report shows that in 2019–20 the office received a total of 987 approaches from the public and health practitioners about a range of matters (a 5 per cent decrease from 2018–19).

Ombudsman and Commissioner, Richelle McCausland, said that COVID–19 had led to unusual complaint trends, with the number of complaints the office received remaining steady and not increasing as much as in previous years. The office:

* received 595 complaints (up two per cent from 2018–19)
* finalised 131 complaints after investigations into the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards (up two per cent from 2018–19).

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Australians on every level and has required regulators such as Ahpra and the National Boards to act swiftly to respond to new and challenging situations,” said the Ombudsman and Commissioner.

The report shows that the office worked with Ahpra and complainants, primarily through its newly established early resolution complaints process, to address concerns in a rapidly changing environment.

As in previous years, most complaints related to the handling of a notification about a registered health practitioner. Concerns were mostly raised by the person who made the notification, rather than the health practitioner who was the subject of the notification.

Health practitioners were more likely to contact the office about registration issues.

Common complaint themes were communication problems, delays in progressing matters and perceptions of unfair policies and procedures.

This financial year also marked 10 years since Ahpra, the National Boards and the NHPO were established.

“It is a privilege to serve as the Ombudsman and Commissioner on the 10-year anniversary of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme,” said Ms McCausland.

“I look forward to continuing to strive for fair and positive change in the regulation of registered health practitioners for the Australian community.”

“I encourage anyone who would like to make a complaint to call my office on 1300 795 265 or visit our new website to make a complaint online at www.nhpo.gov.au,” she said.

**For more information or for high resolution images please contact Lara Beissbarth at lara.beissbarth@nhpo.gov.au.**