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Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

## Media release

20 May 2013

### Community Reference Group appointed

Community voices will be heard at the very heart of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (National Scheme) with the establishment of a Community Reference Group to work with AHPRA and the National Boards - the first time a national group of this kind has been established in Australia.

Seven members from the community, who are not health practitioners, have been appointed to the group (listed overleaf), which will be chaired by Mr Paul Laris, a community member on two Boards in the National Scheme.

The group will have a number of roles, including providing feedback, information and advice on strategies for building better knowledge in the community about health practitioner regulation, but also advising AHPRA on how to better understand, and most importantly, meet, community needs.

AHPRA CEO Mr Martin Fletcher said that the Community Reference Group was an important step to increasing community input into health practitioner regulation.

'Health practitioner regulation affects everyone, because it is about public safety. But not many people are aware of how it works or what it does,' Mr Fletcher said.

'The Community Reference Group will work with the 14 National Boards and AHPRA and advise us how we can build community awareness, understanding and support for the Australia's regulatory scheme for health practitioners,' he said.

The group will be chaired by Mr Paul Laris, who is a community member of the Medical Board of Australia as well as of its South Australian Board. Mr Laris said the group's establishment was timely.

'The national regulatory scheme is firmly in place. There are already community members on all National Boards, and this new advisory group will give another voice to the wider community,' Mr Laris said

'The Community Reference Group will establish an important channel for greater community input and advice to the National Boards and AHPRA, and help build community understanding of the importance of regulation in protecting the public,' he said.

As part of a scheduled review this year, the National Boards are undertaking wide-ranging consultations on the standards, codes and guidelines that establish the requirements for registration of practitioners.

'It is vital that health service users have a major input into the review of standards, codes and guidelines. The purpose of the scheme is to ensure public safety and access to safe and effective health care. We can best ensure that by involving the community in the planning, implementation and delivery of the scheme,' said Mr Laris.

The establishment of the Community Reference Group follows a series of community forums held by AHPRA in 2012, in partnership with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF). The forums were an

opportunity for AHPRA and the National Boards to hear, first hand, the thoughts and opinions of members of the community, and better understand how to build ongoing engagement with the community. Attendees to these forums were encouraged to nominate for the Community Reference Group.

CHF CEO, Ms Carol Bennett, said that establishing a group which had the purpose of representing community voices and help engage the wider community is an important step in the maturation of the national scheme for regulating health practitioners.

'The Community Reference Group will ensure that consumers have a voice in the regulation of health practitioners. This group will also be a key part of AHPRA's consumer engagement strategy, which began last year with a series of community briefings across Australia,' said Ms Bennett.

The Community Reference Group will have its first meeting in June 2013.

## The Community Reference Group

### Chair

Mr Paul Laris is the Chair of the Community Reference Group. He is also a community member on both the Medical Board of Australia and their South Australian Board.

Mr Laris is a consultant who has worked in evaluating and planning for human services and the environment for the past 12 years. He has worked as a social worker in community health services, a manager of community health centres, and a health services planner.

Mr Laris was appointed to the Board of Directors of the North West Area Health Service (The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Lyell McEwin Hospitals) in 2002. In 2003, he was appointed to the Board of the Conservation Council of SA and has been Vice-President of the Western Adelaide Coastal Residents Association since 2004.

Mr Laris was appointed as the Community Reference Group Chair by the Community Reference Group Steering Committee.

### Members

The following members have been appointed to the Community Reference Group:

- Melissa Cadzow
- Darlene Cox
- Jacqui Gibson
- Jennifer Morris
- Merle Smith
- Sue Viney, and
- Michelle Wright.

Applications were received through two streams; via a process run by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia; and through a process run by AHPRA.

## For more information

- Visit [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au) under *Contact us* to lodge an online enquiry form
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