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# AHPRA

Review of stakeholder perceptions of AHPRA and the National Boards

A Social Research Project

November 2018

Supplementary report prepared for:  
***The Psychology Board of Australia***

Truly<sup>®</sup>  
Deeply



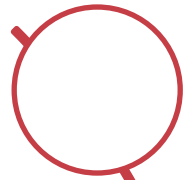
# Introduction

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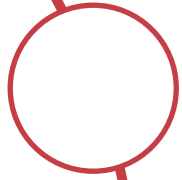
- Truly Deeply has been engaged by the Australian Health Practitioner Agency (AHPRA) to test the perception of sentiment towards AHPRA and the National Boards. This review is intended to help AHPRA and National Boards better understand what stakeholders think and feel about the organisation and to identify how to facilitate ongoing confidence and trust in the work performed by AHPRA and National Boards.
- The study has used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically extended interviews (face to face and via the telephone), focus groups and online surveys.
- A single, integrated report has been provided to AHPRA documenting the key themes and results.
- A separate summary has been provided for each of the National Boards based on the results of the online survey with practitioners.
- The purpose of this report is to present a subset of findings specifically for the **Psychology Board of Australia**.

# An overview of the methodology

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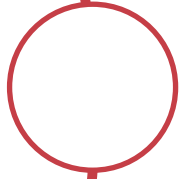


A **four stage** approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative research approaches has been used.



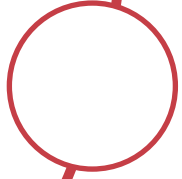
**Stage 1** comprised a total of 53 qualitative interviews. This consisted of interviews with the Chair of every National Board (15); the Executive Officer of almost every National Board (13), Government health providers (3); major health employers (3); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy group representatives (5); Co-regulatory partners (4); Professions Reference Group members (3); representatives from CALD communities (2) and 'Other' various stakeholders (5).

These interviews were conducted between August 10 and September 26, 2018.



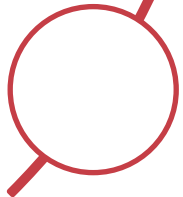
**Stage 2** involved three focus groups. The three groups were conducted with i) Members of the Community Reference Group; ii) Members of the Professions Reference Group and iii) Accreditation Authority representatives.

These groups were conducted between August 14 - 22, 2018.



**Stage 3** consisted of an online survey with practitioners from all 15 registered professions.

This survey was conducted between September 17 – 25, 2018.



**Stage 4** consisted of an online survey with a representative sample of the Australian general public.

This survey was conducted between September 17 – 25, 2018.

# Quantitative approach

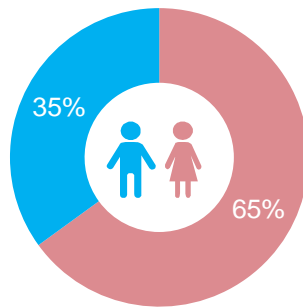
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- Online surveys were conducted with practitioners as well as the broader community following the qualitative investigation. Truly Deeply developed the questionnaires in consultation with AHPRA.
- The questionnaires were developed to allow initial findings in the qualitative to be further explored and validated. Additional pre-codes and lists of words and statements were included in the survey following feedback from interviews and discussion with stakeholders.
- Respondents to the Community Survey were sourced using an external panel provider.
- Participants in the Practitioner Survey were sourced by AHPRA (using software that allowed the survey to be deployed to a random sample of practitioners in each profession).
- The practitioner sample has been weighted to ensure an equal ‘voice’ within the total sample of registered health practitioners (with the sample of ‘nurses’ and ‘midwives’ further separated). This has been done to ensure that the views of (for example) of ‘psychologists’, which accounted for 14% of responses to the survey, does not distort the views of other professions, which accounted for a much smaller response overall to the survey.
- Once the surveys were closed, statistical analysis was conducted by Truly Deeply to summarise and compare the quantitative findings.

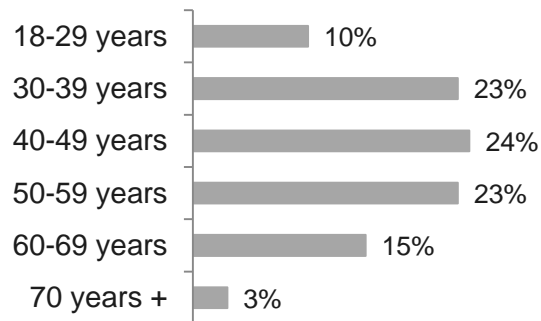
|                        | Community Survey  | Practitioner Survey |
|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Fieldwork dates        | September 19 - 25 | September 19 - 27   |
| Responses              | <b>1,020</b>      | <b>5,694</b>        |
| Email invitations sent | na                | 100,257             |
| Response rate          | na                | 6.0%                |

# Sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,694)

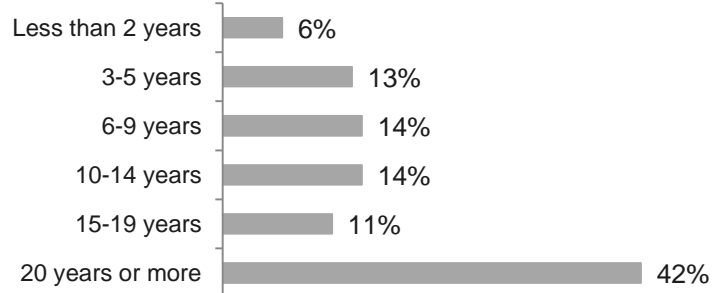
## Gender



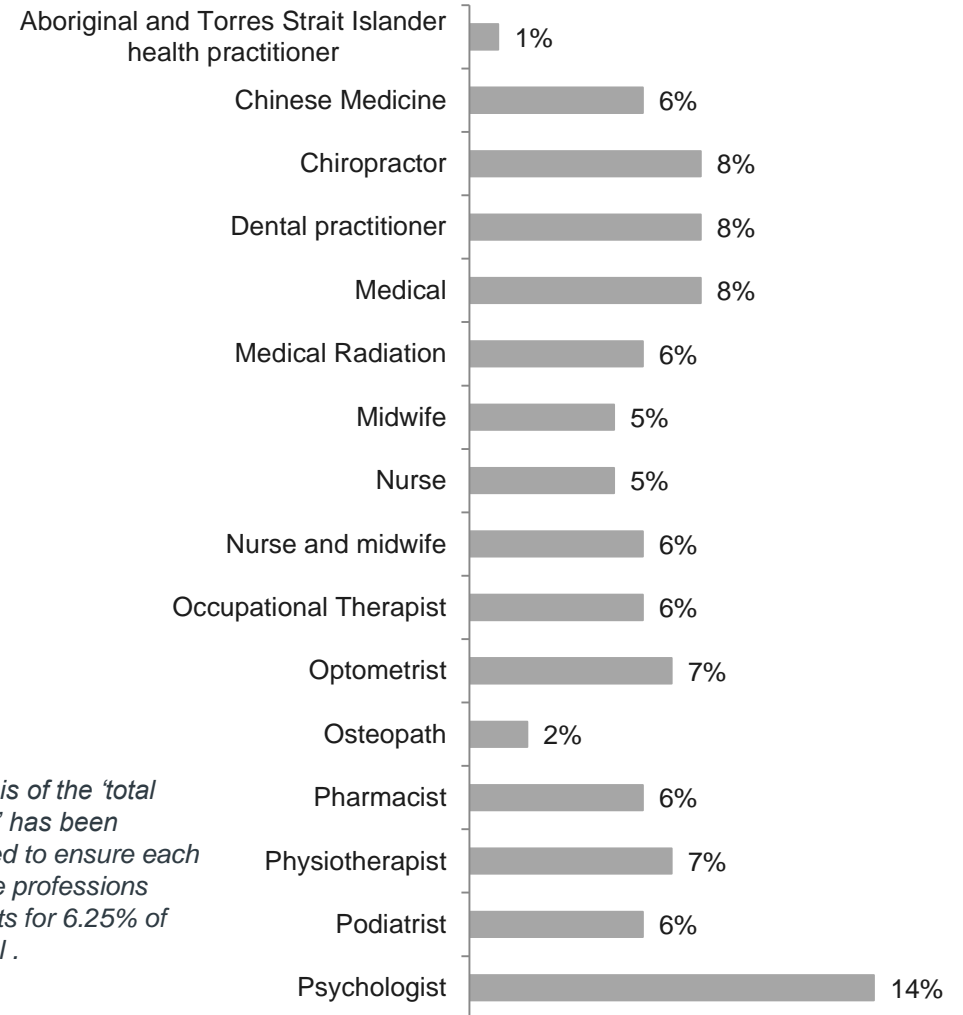
## Age



## Years in practice



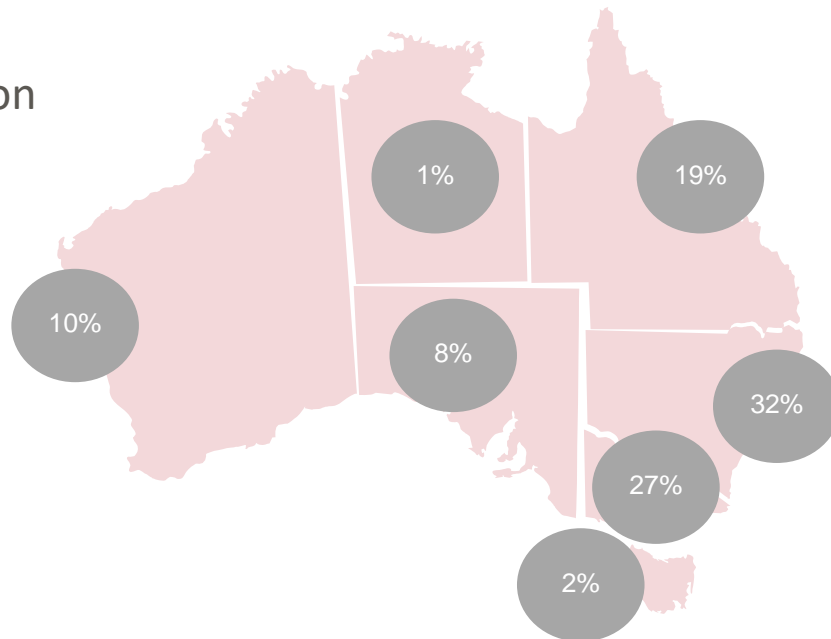
## Practitioner type\*



*\*Analysis of the 'total sample' has been weighted to ensure each of these professions accounts for 6.25% of the total.*

# Sample of registered practitioners (n = 5,694)

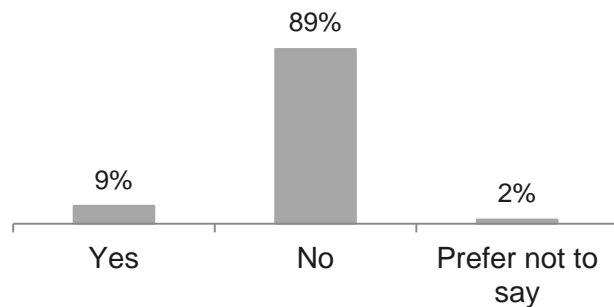
Location



Metro: 66%

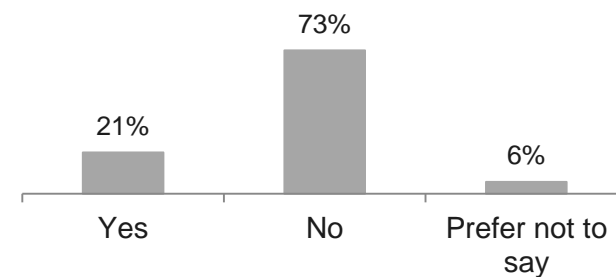
Regional : 34%

% who have had a complaint ever made against them to AHPRA or their Board as a registered Health Practitioner\*



\* As identified by individual respondents

% who have ever been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards\*



\* As identified by individual respondents

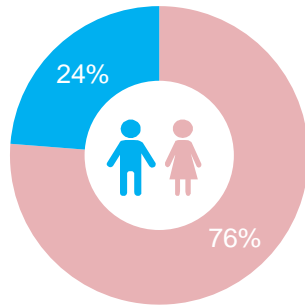
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Summary of results of the online survey with registered health practitioners.

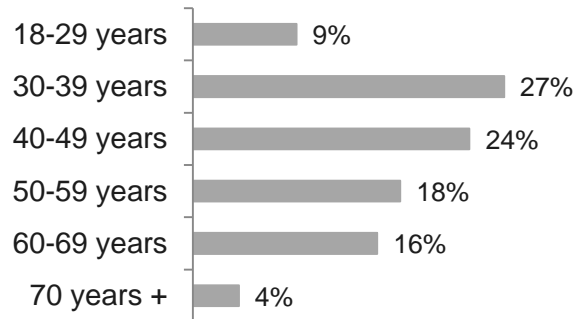
Specific insights into the responses from:  
**psychologists**

# Sample of psychologists (n=787)

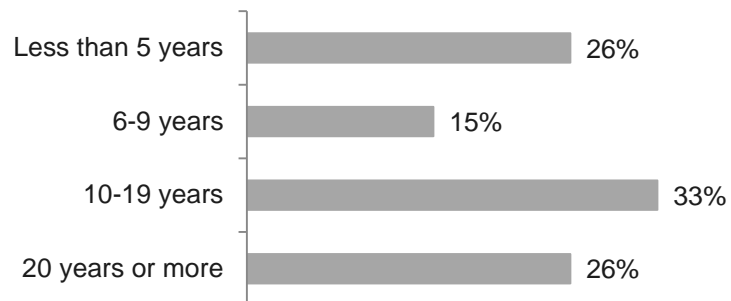
## Gender:



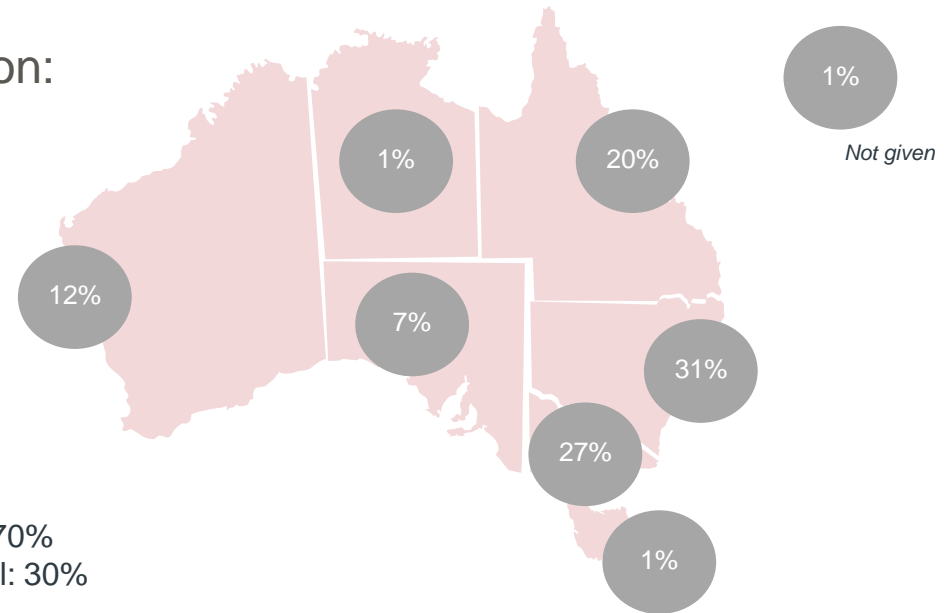
## Age:



## Years in practice:

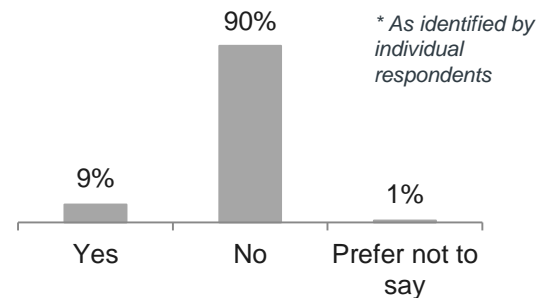


## Location:

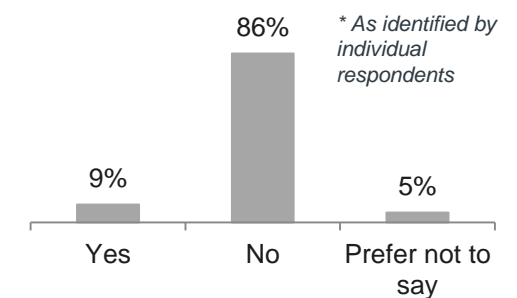


Metro: 70%  
Regional: 30%

% who have had a complaint ever made against them to AHPRA or their Board as a registered Health Practitioner\*



% who have ever been audited to check their compliance with the mandatory registration standards\*





# Perceptions of the Psychology Board of Australia (Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with the (National Board)?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=787)

| Perception                | % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Regulators</b>         | <b>43%</b>   | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| <b>Bureaucratic</b>       | <b>42%</b>   | <b>(+16%)</b>   |
| Administrators            | 36%  | (+1%)   |
| Necessary                 | 36%  | (+1%)   |
| <b>For practitioners</b>  | <b>28%</b>   | <b>(-8%)</b>  |
| Decision-makers           | 28%  | (+1%)   |
| For the public            | 25%  | (+2%)   |
| <b>Rigid</b>              | <b>23%</b>   | <b>(+12%)</b>   |
| <b>Out of touch</b>       | <b>20%</b>   | <b>(+8%)</b>  |
| <b>Poor communicators</b> | <b>19%</b>   | <b>(+9%)</b>  |

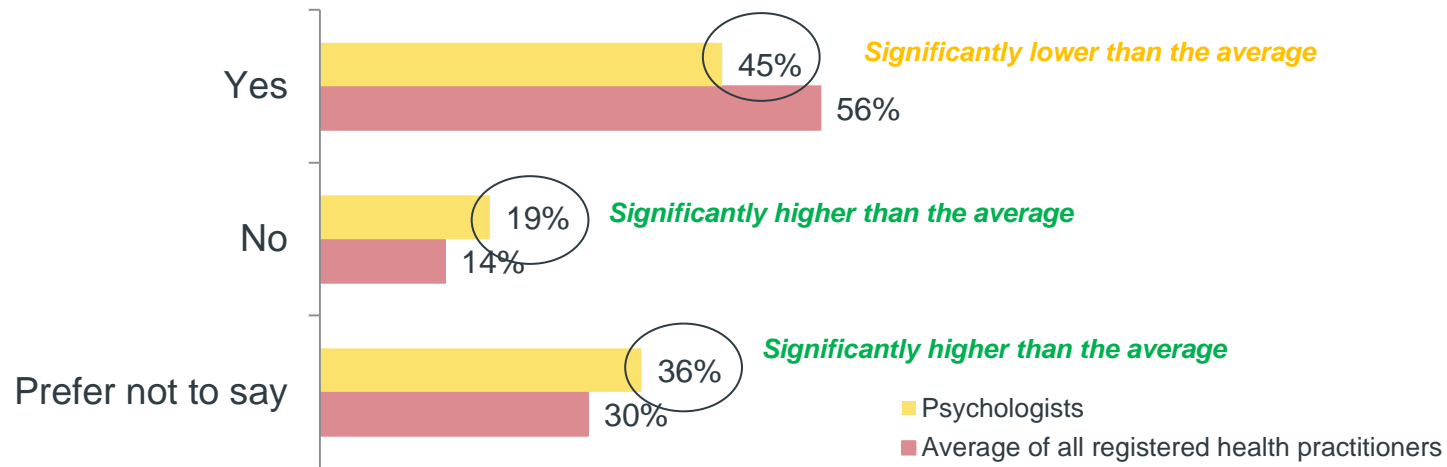
| Perception              | % of practitioners with that perception of the Board | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Controlling</b>      | <b>18%</b>   | <b>(+8%)</b>  |
| <b>Intimidating</b>     | <b>18%</b>   | <b>(+8%)</b>  |
| Competent               | 15%  | (-3%)   |
| <b>Aloof</b>            | <b>14%</b>   | <b>(+7%)</b>  |
| <b>Secretive</b>        | <b>12%</b>   | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| <b>Advocates</b>        | <b>11%</b>   | <b>(-7%)</b>  |
| <b>Antiquated</b>       | <b>9%</b>  | <b>(+4%)</b>  |
| <b>Shows leadership</b> | <b>9%</b>  | <b>(-4%)</b>  |
| <b>Helpful</b>          | <b>7%</b>  | <b>(-5%)</b>  |
| <b>Fair</b>             | <b>7%</b>  | <b>(-4%)</b>  |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

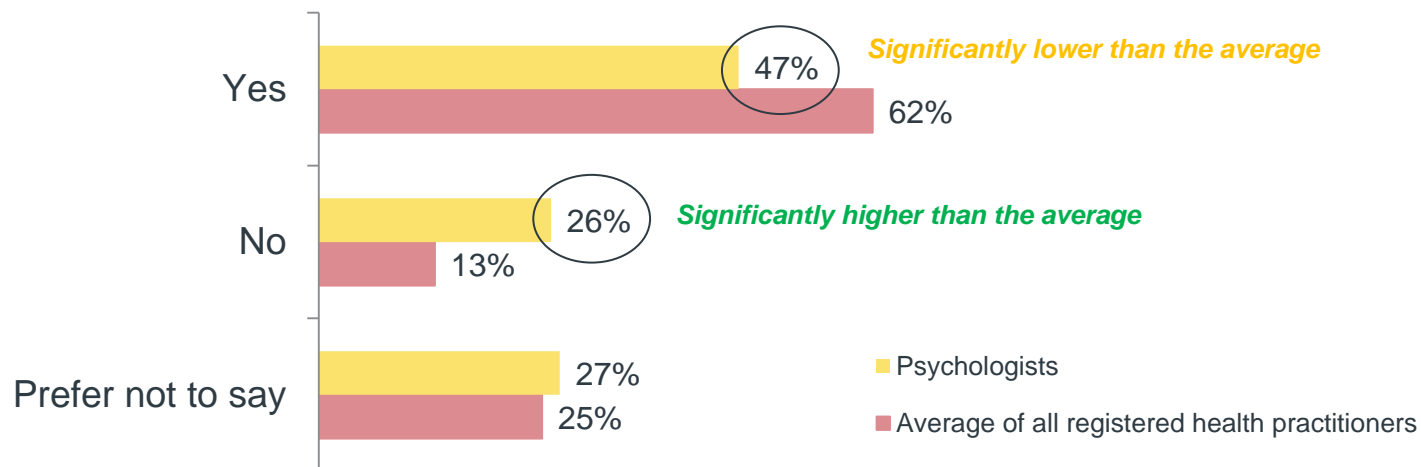
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

# Levels of confidence and trust in the Psychology Board of Australia

Q. Do you feel confident that your National Board is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust your National Board?



# What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in the Psychology Board of Australia

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## Indicators of trust: **47% trust the Board**

*Processes are clear and transparent; purposes are ethical; no motive other than protection of the public can be identified (to date).*

*Documents and statements represent high standards and clear desire to regulate the profession so that the public is safe. Individuals associated with provisional registration process seem professional, dedicated and consistent.*

*By setting rigorous standards they aim to protect the public.*

*They set strict professional expectations especially for internships. This helps to ensure a skilled workforce.*

*I have had no reason to not trust them.*

*They seem professional and competent.*

*Having observed the fair and equitable care and concern PsyBA demonstrates in what they undertake, and the recognition that they understand the seriousness of what they are responsible for, I trust PsyBA.*

*Has been trustworthy in all my dealings with it.*

## Barriers to trust: **26% DO NOT trust the Board**

*Continued registration of unfit practitioners.*

*They have no interest in the profession of psychology, they are blinkered to clinical psychology and have actively undermined the diversity of the profession, they won't answer questions directly in public forums, they institute processes without any seeming understanding of the negative consequences, they are NOT evidence-based, they totally overstate the risk to the public and in so doing, undermine their registered practitioners.*

*Too many vested interests. Strong male gender bias.*

*They are slow to respond to complaints and to investigate rogue practitioners. They do not advocate for a high level of training of psychologists.*

*They seem unwilling to support the development of the profession with improving professional standards, caving to government and lobby.*

*Lack of information about what they are doing.*

*Out of touch, old fashion.*

# Full list of responses provided separately

# Perceptions of AHPRA amongst psychologists

(Top 20 associations)

Q. Which of the following words or statements, if any, do you strongly associate with AHPRA?

Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=787)

| Perception                | % of practitioners with that perception of AHPRA | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Regulators</b>         | <b>59%</b>                                       | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| <b>Administrators</b>     | <b>59%</b>                                       | <b>(+7%)</b>  |
| <b>Bureaucratic</b>       | <b>55%</b>                                       | <b>(+15%)</b>   |
| Necessary                 | 42%  | (+2%)   |
| For the public            | 37%  | (-1%)   |
| <b>Rigid</b>              | <b>28%</b>                                       | <b>(+10%)</b>   |
| Controlling               | 17%  | (0%)  |
| Decision makers           | 28%  | (+3%)   |
| <b>Poor communicators</b> | <b>26%</b>                                       | <b>(+12%)</b>   |
| <b>Intimidating</b>       | <b>21%</b>                                       | <b>(+4%)</b>  |

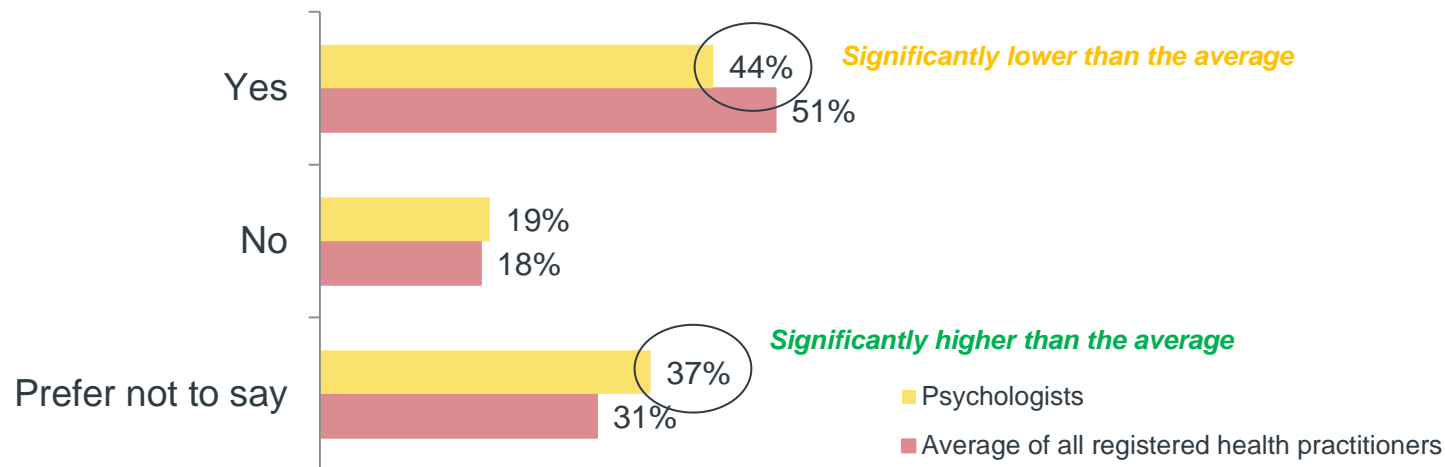
| Perception               | % of practitioners with that perception of AHPRA | Difference compared to the average across all professions |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <b>For practitioners</b> | <b>21%</b>                                       | <b>(-9%)</b>  |
| <b>Out of touch</b>      | <b>17%</b>                                       | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| <b>Controlling</b>       | <b>17%</b>                                       | <b>(-)</b>  |
| <b>Aloof</b>             | <b>13%</b>                                       | <b>(+5%)</b>  |
| Competent                | 13%  | (-2%)   |
| Secretive                | 10%  | (+2%)   |
| Helpful                  | 8%   | (-1%)   |
| <b>Accessible</b>        | <b>7%</b>  | <b>(-6%)</b>  |
| <b>Fair</b>              | <b>7%</b>  | <b>(-3%)</b>  |
| <b>Approachable</b>      | <b>6%</b>  | <b>(-3%)</b>  |

**Green** indicates a result *significantly higher* than the average across all professions.

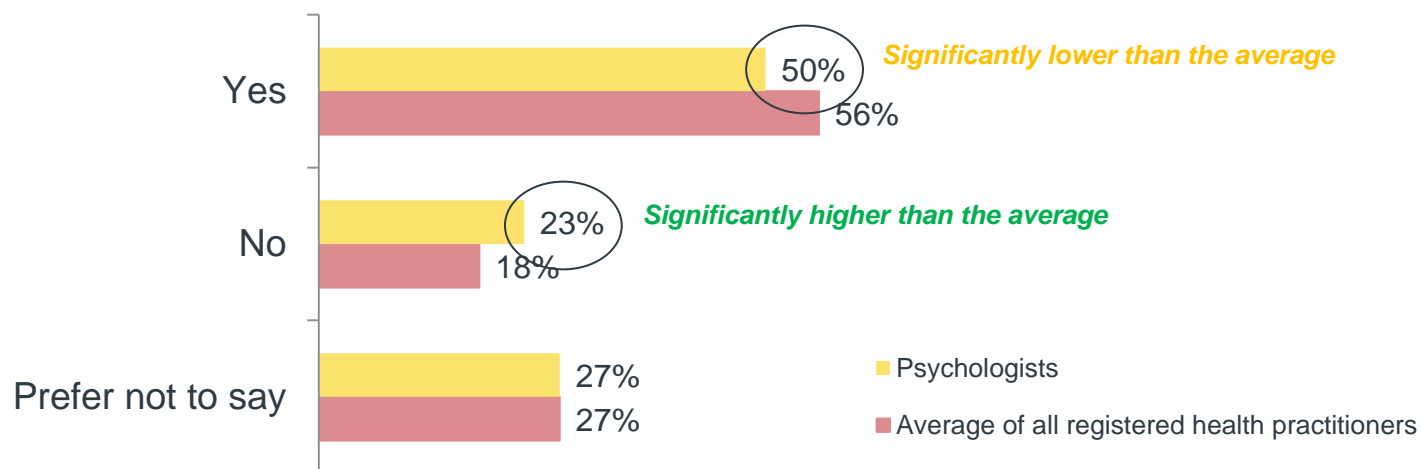
**Orange** indicates a result *significantly lower* than the average across all professions.

# Levels of confidence and trust in AHPRA amongst psychologists

Q. Do you feel confident that **AHPRA** is doing everything it can to keep the public safe?



Q. Do you trust **AHPRA**?



# What are the indicators of trust and barriers to trust in AHPRA amongst psychologists

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## Indicators of trust: **50% trust AHPRA**

*Because they are the body that registers and enables my profession and I am not aware of any reasons that AHPRA is not trustworthy.*

*Professional standards and registration across states and territories has been most welcome. High, ethical values.*

*I have lived through the change from state to national registration. This was done efficiently and competently.*

*I have had a good experience with them so far. They seem, professional and knowledgeable. Reliable and consistent.*

*Having observed their processes, I am confident that they undertake consideration of matters in a fair and equitable manner.*

*I have no reason not to trust AHPRA. My judgement comes from knowing others who also trust AHPRA.*

*AHPRA provides valuable and open communication via newsletters regarding their operations, and appear to be effective in upholding the standards of the profession.*

*Open and transparent, rules and processes.*

*# Full list of responses provided separately*

## Barriers to trust: **23% DO NOT trust AHPRA**

*Unreliable, poor communication.*

*Double standards. Creates divisions among general and clinical psychologists.*

*Given the manner they have investigated complaints, there is a total disregard for individuals regardless of the situation.*

*I feel they are inconsistent with their feedback and marking for internship requirements.*

*It is medically focussed and has no understanding of organisational psychology and the great work they do.*

*From a health practitioner perspective, I cannot trust in their administrative processes. In my experience, their processes are excessively lengthy and bureaucratic. They lack transparency and errors frequently occur.*

*I have had direct experience with the Psych Reg Board which was traumatic, overly complicated and long, with them making errors with confidentiality and procedures.*

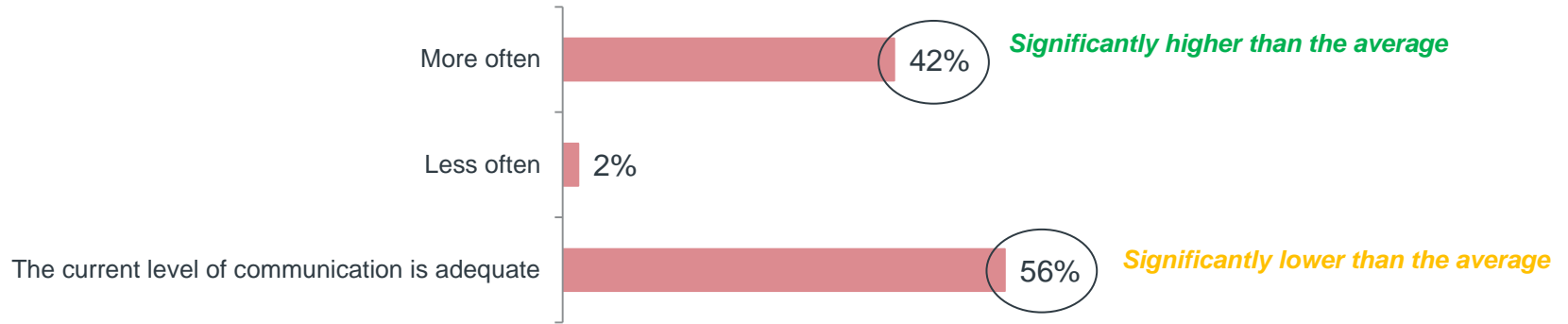
*Not transparent.*

*Mistakes made during registration process.*

# Response to communication by the Psychology Board of Australia

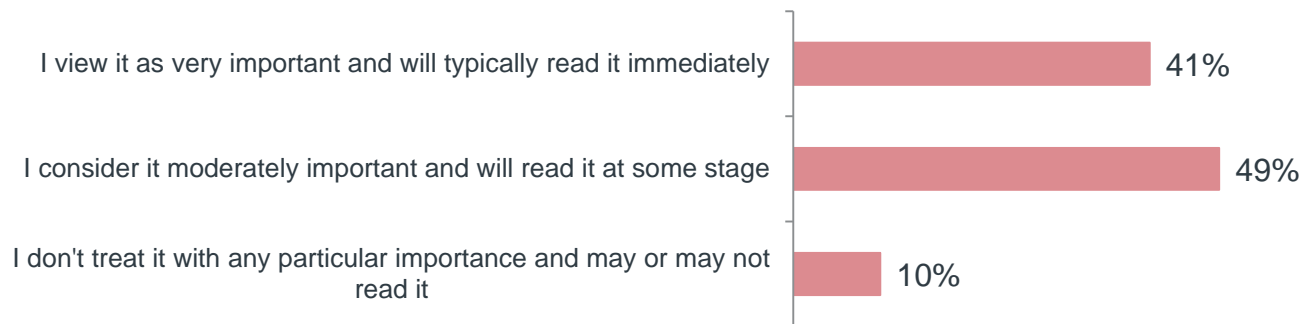
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Q. *Would you like (National Board) to communicate with you.....?*



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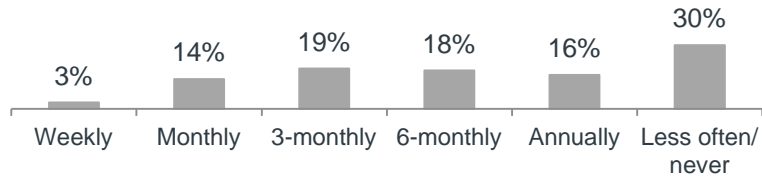
Q. *How do you typically respond to communication you receive from (National Board)?*



Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this specific Board (n=787)

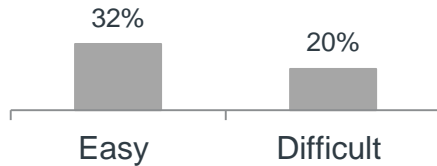
# Use of the Psychology Board of Australia website

Q. How often do you visit the website of (your National Board)?



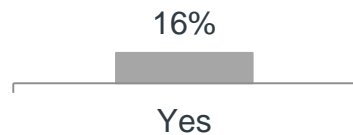
Base: Total sample of practitioners registered with this board

Q. How easy or difficult is it to find the information you were looking for on the (National Board) website?



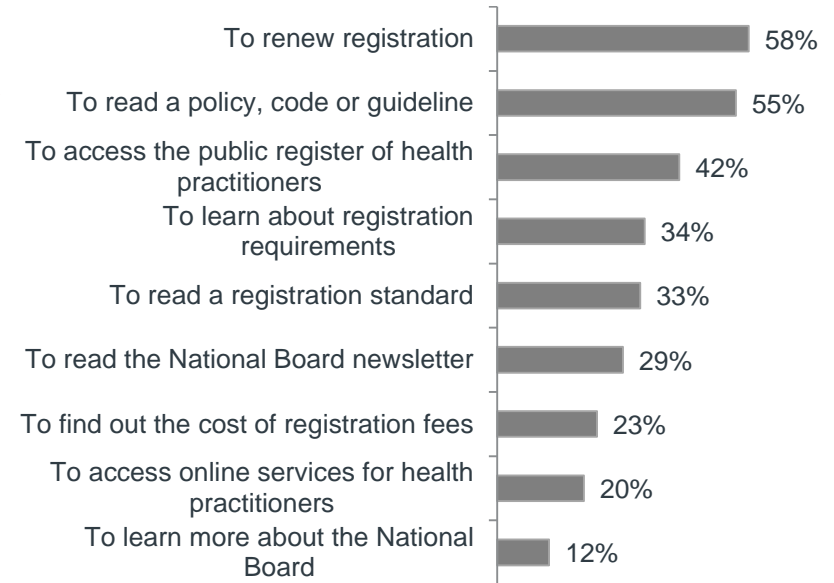
Base: Practitioners who have visited that board's website

Q. Is there any information you have looked for on the website of (National Board) but not been able to find?



Base: People who have visited that board's website

## Reasons for visiting the National Board website



## Additional information sought by practitioners include (but not limited to)...

- *Investigations into treatment method compliance & outcomes*
- *Clear information about the registrar program*
- *Receipts for annual fees*
- *Supervisor registration*
- *Code of ethics*
- *Looking for a registered psychologist's name*
- *Support for therapists*



# Additional feedback from psychologists

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## Sample of open ended responses *(full list of responses provided separately)*

*Would be nice to hear more about their positive roles as opposed to auditing/response to complaints (haven't heard good things about the process from a practitioner point of view).*

*I have found interactions with the board and AHPRA to be very frustrating at times, particularly because advice on matters can vary wildly depending on who you speak to on the phone. Transparency and communication regarding registration and policy matters could be improved.*

*You are widely regarded as incompetent. There are a number of people who are experiencing mental health issues and suicidality and who are leaving my profession because of you. They probably won't do this survey. Get your act together - we need proper regulation of health professions that doesn't work against either the public or the professionals who do things right.*

*Please stop making us feel scared. We are all doing the best we can professionally and learning more all the time. 1 hour short of PD workshops doesn't make anyone more or less equipped. Relax.*

*My experience of having a complaint made against me, which was found to be unproven, was a most unpleasant and drawn out experience and should have been obvious at the first instance that it was a vexatious complaint.*

*I feel that AHPRA is backwards and rigid in their processes. However, I also feel they are inconsistent with feedback from assignments in the internship programs. I would like more consistency.*

*I pay a registration fee to AHPRA (so that AHPRA can potentially act against me). Yet when I have had issues with the timeliness of their actions I have been dismissed or asked to send a request from someone with a higher status. I think this is offensive to a professional dealing with their governing body.*

*Respectfully, AHPRA has a culture of fear. People are careful to minimise communication with them for fear of the impact on professional registration. I understand the importance to the public, and to regulate health practitioners, but I struggle to have any examples of positive interactions with AHPRA, save for checking the registration of potential employees. I pay a yearly fee, which is significant, and try to have no further contact. Even responding to this survey I am concerned about the potential for my responses to have a negative consequence.*

*I don't really get where my registration fee goes.*

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# More information

For further information about this study please contact:

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Truly Deeply

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