



Health Professional Councils Authority

NSW Health Professional Councils and Health Professional Councils Authority

Joint Communications Framework

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1 About us

The 15 NSW Health Professional Councils (the Councils) and the Health Professional Councils Authority (HPCA) are an integral part of the NSW healthcare system. Our role is to protect public safety and maintain trust in health professional practice by managing complaints about registered health practitioners and students in NSW.

We are part of the [National Registration and Accreditation Scheme](#) and work in accordance with the [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law \(NSW\)](#) and the [Health Practitioner Regulation \(New South Wales\) Regulation 2016](#). When dealing with complaints, we act in a fair, transparent, and efficient manner with public safety as our paramount legal obligation.

We respect diversity and are committed to creating a safe healthcare environment for the NSW public by upholding professional standards, supporting evidence-informed practice and minimising harm.

2 Purpose

Open and effective communication and engagement form a critical part of our [Joint Strategic Plan](#). We recognise that this approach to communication is central in achieving our goals of protecting the health and safety of the NSW public and supporting improvements to the overall healthcare system.

This Framework sets out our key communications goals and principles that guide our communications activities and how we interact with our diverse stakeholder base as well as within our organisations.

3 Our communications goals

Our approach to communications plays a key role in supporting the delivery of our strategic priorities: customer focus, system performance, and culture and capability. Although audiences, channels and activities may differ between the various Councils and the HPCA, our core communications goals are to:

- raise awareness and understanding of our role in the NSW healthcare system
- develop and maintain strong and productive relationships with our stakeholders.

How our communications goals contribute to our strategic priorities:

1. Customer focus

- Enhance our communications with our customers by ensuring information about healthcare regulation and processes around assessing and managing complaints are accessible and easy to understand. Provide transparent, accessible, and timely information to all parties impacted by a regulatory risk or issue.
- Provide accurate and evidence-based information or recommendations in a way that encourages health practitioners to take action and follow advice and guidance on safe practice.
- Create effective and strategic partnerships with our stakeholders and their extensive networks for best outcomes and wider reach for our communications activities. Ensure that our communication and information is consistent not only across the organisation but also with our co-regulatory partners.

2. System performance

- Seek feedback to improve our services based on consumer experiences. Ensure that training for staff and Council members includes communications and engagement modules so that we understand and use communications effectively to achieve our goals as an organisation.

3. Culture and Capability

- Identify learning and development opportunities for staff on best practice communications and engagement to implement throughout our business operations.

4 Our stakeholders

We are committed to involving and working with our key stakeholders in supporting a safe healthcare system for the NSW public. We work with a diverse range of internal and external stakeholders. Our internal stakeholders are key in informing decisions as experts in their field and promoting our work while our external stakeholders play an important role in maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the co-regulatory model in which we operate.

For better and more effective engagement, we use the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to help clarify the level of engagement we have with our stakeholders.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | To place final decision making in the hands of the public. |
| PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC | We will keep you informed. | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. | We will implement what you decide. |

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

While this Spectrum refers specifically to engaging with the ‘public’, it can also be applied as a guide to selecting the most appropriate level of engagement for different types of stakeholders in different situations.

The level of engagement with our stakeholders depends largely on our relationship with them, the purpose of engagement, as well as our goals, timeframes, and resources. As a statutory body, there are also legal obligations as well as limitations to the level of engagement with specific stakeholders.

| Our internal stakeholders | Level of engagement |
|---|---|
| Council Members – experts in their fields who bring a broad range of knowledge, skills, and diversity. Decisions made by Council members are done so with the public safety as the primary consideration. | Encourage collaboration and engagement to develop resources that can be shared across Councils and HPCA teams for greater efficiency and more consistent messaging. |
| Hearing/panel members – experts in their field who support Councils with their regulatory decision making. | Inform and provide appropriate training and professional development to support hearing members with their role. |
| HPCA staff – provide administrative support to the Councils and represent our organisation to external stakeholders | Open communication and information sharing. Involve and empower staff to drive change that creates and fosters a positive, open, and collaborative culture across the organisation to support improvements in our service delivery. |
| NSW Ministry of Health | Partner with the Ministry to share and distribute our messages and educational resources for a greater community reach. Proactively advise the Ministry of any issues which may generate media interest. |

| Our external stakeholders | Level of engagement |
|--|--|
| Health consumers/complainants – people who use health services, as well as their family and carers who have made a complaint about a health practitioner. | Provide timely and open information about our processes, decisions, and outcomes as well as their options and rights throughout the complaint management process. Seek feedback to improve our services. |
| General NSW public – a diverse cultural and linguistic community for whom we strive to create a safe healthcare environment. | Provide open and accessible information about our services and processes to assist the public in understanding our role in the NSW healthcare system and their options in raising concerns about a health practitioner. Issuing outcomes from our regulatory decisions as well as public warnings about unsafe health practitioners. |
| Health practitioners subject to a complaint – registered health practitioners in NSW who are subject to a complaint about their health, performance or conduct from a health consumer, colleague, or employer. | Provide timely and open information about our processes, decisions, and outcomes as well as their options and rights throughout the complaint management process. Seek feedback to improve our services. |
| Health practitioners and students – all health practitioners registered to practice in NSW as well as students. | Provide open, timely and accessible information and resources to support and educate health practitioners to practise safely and competently. Provide information about our services and processes to assist practitioners in understanding our role and processes, and what to do in case a complaint has been made about them. |
| Other healthcare regulatory bodies – Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC), Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), National Boards with whom we work in a co-regulatory model | Focus on liaison and building strong relationships, streamlining processes for a more effective complaint management system and sharing of resources to promote high standards of practice. Strong and effective relationships with our co-regulators promotes |

| | |
|---|--|
| | understanding across all parties of current and emerging issues. |
| Universities, other health education providers, employers of health practitioners, professional associations, industrial bodies, insurers, and defence bodies | Partner and collaborate with these organisations and their extensive networks to increase communications reach, leading to mutual benefit. |
| Media | Provide timely and accurate information while ensuring adherence to privacy and confidentiality laws. |

5 Guiding principles for our communications

We strive to adhere to the following guiding principles which describe the way we deliver communications and engagement activities.

Integrity

Providing all our audiences with clear and consistent information about who we are, what we do and how we do it. This involves communicating our legislative requirements (what we must do), jurisdiction (what we are responsible for) and constraints (limitations of what we can do and what information we can disclose). This ensures that we are consistent, manage expectations and build trust with our stakeholders. In all communications, our messaging is guided by the need to balance transparency with privacy and confidentiality.

Efficient

Communicating and making our information, messaging, and resources available in a timely manner without compromising accuracy. It is also about clearly communicating our processes, actions, and decisions, and how these affect our audiences. It is important to set and communicate targets and meet them to build trust with our stakeholders. Efficient also means managing expectations and reducing ineffective communications.

Well-orchestrated

Our communications are consistent and accessible to all audiences regardless of their abilities. We strive to make our information easy to understand by using clear, plain, and familiar language. We identify available channels and use those that are most effective and best support the communication objectives to reach the targeted audiences. Consistency and cohesion between Councils and the HPCA in communications strengthens the messaging and credibility and assists in achieving operational efficiencies.

Proactive

Incorporating communications as part of our research, planning, implementation, and evaluation across our projects. It is about identifying emerging and potential risks and issues, and ways to mitigate these before they happen. This includes working with our audiences to identify issues that may be important to them and us.

Empathetic

Understanding the core needs of our audiences and stakeholders, what they are going through and meeting their needs as best as we can. We often communicate with audiences who may be overwhelmed and distressed due to their circumstances and experiences. We strive to listen to our

audiences to learn about their concerns and offer personalised communication. We also strive to develop content and messages based on their needs and communicate with a human dimension.

6 Internal communications

How we communicate internally is just as important as our external communications.

We are committed to open, honest, and transparent communications with our staff and across the HPCA and Councils. We want to involve and empower staff to drive change that creates and fosters a positive, open, and collaborative culture. This includes providing timely and effective communications to all staff and promoting collaboration and engagement across the various teams within the organisation. Staff connection and engagement with the organisation impact how they interact within the organisation and how they represent our organisation to external stakeholders. As with our external communications, in our interaction with staff and within the organisation we strive to adhere to the principles of effective communications, i.e., integrity, efficient, well-orchestrated, proactive, and empathetic. We also uphold the NSW Health CORE values of Collaboration, Openness, Respect and Empowerment.

7 Branding

Our communications and messaging and the way in which they are delivered seek to instil confidence in, and promote the credibility of, the Councils, the HPCA and the work undertaken in the interests of public protection. We work in a complex, co-regulatory environment so it is important that our stakeholders understand what we do, how we do it and how our work differs to our co-regulatory partners. Within this co-regulatory environment, we need to place our organisation as a trusted and reliable service and source of information around health practitioner regulation in NSW. Part of this is developing resources and training to support staff in communicating our work, processes and advice effectively and correctly using our logos and branding.

8 Evaluation

Evaluation is key in assessing the effectiveness of our messages, stakeholder engagement and overall approach to communications. We monitor our progress via a range of indicators and tools including incorporating feedback surveys in our communications, engaging in consultations with our stakeholders and regularly monitoring traffic to our channels and exposure to our messages. We also assess our activities against our principles of effective communications: integrity, efficient, well-orchestrated, proactive, and empathetic.

Regular monitoring and reporting on our progress is key to ensure continuous improvement and the delivery of effective and targeted communications.