



## President's Message

A joint annual report for the year 2019/20 has been presented on behalf of the 15 health professional councils this year. The annual report can be viewed on the Health Professional Councils Authority's [website](#).

The Dental Council of NSW (Council) continues to fulfil its mandate of protecting the public in NSW through its management of complaints about the performance, conduct and health of dental practitioners and students. Since 2016/17, the Council has continued to see an increase in complaints, the majority of these relating to clinical care and practitioners' performance. This year there has also been an increase in complaints alleging that practitioners are practising outside the scope of dentistry and therefore posing a risk to patients.

The Council continues to be concerned by the number of complaints received about infection control breaches. Following serious infection control breaches in the past, the Council implemented a number of initiatives to ensure that practitioners are aware of their professional obligations regarding infection control.

Following analysis of the data arising from these initiatives, it has been confirmed that the majority of practitioners are complying with the requirements of approved standards/guidelines. The Council continues to undertake random infection control inspections throughout NSW to ensure patient safety is maintained and to confirm practitioners' ongoing compliance with these approved standards/guidelines.

2020 has also brought with it new challenges, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. This has had a direct effect on dental practice, individual practitioners and their staff. Increased levels of dental practice restrictions have been experienced during the pandemic, which resulted in a number of patients not being able to be treated and a number of practitioners being unable to practise the profession. At the time of writing this message, some level of restriction remains in place.

The Council commends practitioners for their cooperation, particularly during the higher level restrictions, and for their ability to adapt quickly to the changes and challenges faced during these unprecedented times. Practitioners' adherence to these practice restrictions, and infection control standards, has ensured that the risk to patient safety has been greatly reduced.

Throughout the year, the Council continued to engage with a number of its stakeholders, not only in relation to the management of complaints and practice related issues, but also in relation to COVID-19. This included dialogue and regular meetings with the Dental Board of Australia; our professional associations; co-regulators; NSW Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders. The benefit of this engagement, particularly in relation to COVID-19, cannot be underestimated.

Under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (NSW), the Council may establish an Education and Research Account to provide funding for research and education purposes related to the health, performance and conduct of registered dental practitioners and



students. During the year, the Council commenced its education and research grants program. Grants are offered twice a year, from March to May and again from September to November. It is pleasing to report that the number of applications is increasing following each round. Learnings from these education/research initiatives will be promulgated in the future.

The success of the Council's work, in ensuring public health and safety, is reliant upon the contribution of many people. This includes Council members, professional officers, Authorised Persons, panel and hearing members, performance and health assessors, and members of our Assessment Committee.

We are all supported by a team of dedicated staff at the Health Professional Councils Authority, in particular the Dental Council team, which is led by the Council's Executive Officer, Mr Colin Borg.

I would like to extend my thanks to everyone involved in the important work of the Council over the past 12 months.

Conjoint Associate Professor F. Shane Fryer OAM  
**President**  
**Dental Council of NSW**