

## Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

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October 2017

### Animal physiotherapy

#### Summary

The Physiotherapy Board of Australia (the Board) publishes registration standards and guidelines on its website. These detail the obligations for initial and ongoing registration as a physiotherapist in Australia.

The Board also publishes frequently asked questions (FAQ) about registration renewal, recency of practice, continuing professional development and the use of protected titles.

Practitioners should read these documents carefully. They are published on the *Codes and guidelines* section of the Board's website at [www.physiotherapyboard.gov.au](http://www.physiotherapyboard.gov.au).

The Board has published additional information for physiotherapists reminding them that practice on animals is not within the scope of the Board's regulatory role in protecting the public. If a physiotherapist's practice is 100 percent animal-based, they will not meet the Board's requirements for recency of practice which requires recent practice on people. Physiotherapists who don't meet the Board's recency of practice standard will be required to undertake remedial action (for example a period of supervised practice) in order to obtain or maintain general registration with the Board. Read the Board's [Update on animal physiotherapy](#).

The following additional FAQ answer common queries that practitioners might have about their obligations under the National Law<sup>1</sup> and what the requirements are if they wish to remain registered with the Board and practise on animals.

#### Why can't I use the title 'animal physiotherapist'?

The National Law protects the public. The National Law regulating physiotherapists in Australia does not extend to practice on animals, only practice relating to people. The title 'Animal physiotherapist' may lead members of the public to assume that the Board also has jurisdiction over physiotherapy practice in relation to animals. This is not the case and has not been the case since the National Law commenced in 2010.

You cannot describe your animal practice this way because generally, the National Law protects the titles 'physiotherapist' and 'physical therapist' and not the type of practice you undertake (your chosen scope of practice) as a physiotherapist.

The difficulty in attaching the word 'animal' to 'physiotherapist' is that the latter term is protected and so the public can be assured anyone claiming to be a physiotherapist is meeting the standards as set out by the Board. An individual would not be able to make a complaint to the Board about the treatment of an animal.

There is further information available on the [AHPRA](#) and Board website about advertising, including the use of protected titles.

#### Can I continue to practise on animals and meet the Board's requirements?

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<sup>1</sup> Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

If your practice includes practice on animals, you must meet the Board's minimum requirements to maintain your registration as a physiotherapist.

If you are a registered physiotherapist who practises on animals and people your practice on animals is not in the scope of the Board's regulatory role in protecting the public.

The National Law does not define what a physiotherapist can do in their practice. The National Law protects titles and for the physiotherapy profession, protected titles are 'physiotherapist' and 'physical therapist'.

Only practitioners who meet the ongoing registration standards can use the title 'physiotherapist' which relates to practice on people and not with animals.

The title protection aspects of the National Law are in addition to the requirement to meet the registration standards and means that you must not use the title 'animal physiotherapist' unless you simultaneously explain that your registration relates to practice on people and that the board does not regulate practice with animals – to leave no room for doubt.

### **I have a Masters qualification in animal related physiotherapy and am involved in the APA animal group.**

Even if you have a higher animal-related qualification, no matter its status in the APA's animal group or internationally, years of experience, respect and interaction with vets or others, animal practice is not recognised or regulated under the National Law. The Board's regulatory framework relates to practice on people and the National Law protects titles relating to that practice. The Board does not stipulate that you cannot treat animals.

You cannot count any practice on animals towards meeting the Board's requirements.

### **What practice satisfies the Board's registration requirements for recent practice?**

The Board's registration standards include the *Recency of practice registration standard*. This requires you to complete at least 150 hours of practice in the previous registration year, or 450 hours over three years. This practice must be completed practicing with people. practicing on animals is not considered as practice for the purposes of meeting this standard.

The definition of 'practice' is intentionally broad. The National Law protects the use of *titles* rather than defining a practitioner's scope of practice, as was sometimes the case prior to the commencement of the National Law in 2010. The following definition is published in all registration standards:

*Practice means any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a practitioner in their regulated health profession. For the purposes of this code, practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes using professional knowledge in a direct non-clinical relationship with patients or clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles and any other roles that have an impact on safe, effective delivery of health services in the health profession.*

The Board cannot provide you with an answer as to whether your practice meets this definition. It is up to you to provide evidence if asked, either through audit or when a complaint has been made about you, that you are trained and competent to perform that practice.

The Board's [Code of Conduct](#) provides the ethical and professional framework to which physiotherapists are professionally bound and may be held to account against.

### **Can I declare that I have met the Board's Continuing professional development (CPD) registration standard if my CPD is animal related?**

The National Law is about the protection of the public. The definition of 'the public' does not extend to animals. Therefore your CPD must relate to your practice on people and not on animals.

It is up to you to provide evidence that your CPD relates to your chosen scope of practice when practising with people. The Board does not endorse any individual CPD course or type of CPD. If you do any animal-related CPD and declare this in support of meeting the Board's registration standard on CPD, you would have to convince the Board (if you are audited or if a complaint has been made about you) that this CPD directly relates to your chosen scope of practice when practising with people, not animals.

### **What is the Board's preferred form of documenting practice?**

Because the definition of practice is so broad, there is no preferred form of documenting practice.

### **What if I have only been practising on animals and not people? Will I meet the recency of practice requirements?**

You cannot meet the *Recency of practice registration standard* if your practice is 100 per cent on animals.

You need to complete at least 150 hours of practice related to treating people in the previous registration year, or 450 hours in the previous three years in order to meet the Board's registration standard.

There are many ways to meet the *Recency of practice registration standard*.

The *Recency of practice registration standard* provides for flexibility and enables you to meet the standard over a three year period. You don't need to practise every year as long as you practise at least 450 hours over the three-year period before renewing your registration. The 450 hours can be at any time during the previous three years, in one block or multiple blocks. For example, you could practise in year one, have year two off and practise again in year three.

See the registration standard, guidelines and FAQs published on the Board's website for more information.

### **When is my registration as a physiotherapist due for renewal?**

You are due to renew your registration with the Board annually by 30 November which is when you are asked to declare whether you meet the standards.

Look out for a reminder to renew from AHPRA when online renewal is open. You will get email reminders several times during the renewal period. You can use our online services to check that AHPRA has your current contact details. Be sure to check the national *Register of practitioners* to confirm your registration details.

### **What registration standards do I have to meet?**

As a physiotherapist in Australia, you must meet the Board's [registration standards](#) when you renew your registration each year. These registration standards include criminal history, indemnity insurance arrangements (PII), recency of practice and continuing professional development (CPD).

### **What do I need to know about the registration requirements?**

The Board expects you to declare when you renew your registration that you have met the requirements set out in their [registration standards](#).

Before making any declarations, you must read the Board's requirements for renewal of registration, particularly recency of practice, CPD and PII arrangements.

Make sure you understand these requirements before making your declarations because you may be asked to give additional information in support of your application and/or they can be checked through an audit or complaint.

### **What is the process if I tick 'no' – that I haven't met the *Recency of Practice registration standard*?**

It doesn't mean that you can't renew your registration. It will mean that the Board will ask you for further information as part of your application. Your name will not be removed from the register whilst the Board considers your renewal application.

It is exactly the same process you would follow to resume practice after a break (for whatever reason) and the *Recency of practice registration standard*, [guideline and FAQs](#) explain the requirements and provide further information.

You will be asked for information about what you used to do (when practicing on/treating people), how long you've been away from practicing on and/or treating people, and what you intend to do when you return to practicing on and/or treating people.

There is no one way to return to practice. Each application is considered on its merits and what, if any, conditions are imposed on your registration (e.g. a period of supervised practice) will depend on your circumstances. For instance, if you used to practice clinically, had a break and then wanted to return to administrative or non-clinical practice, the risk of harm to the public is less than for a practitioner who proposed to go from doing administrative physiotherapy practice, had a break and then wanted to return to clinical practice.

### **What if I tick 'yes' – that I have met the *Recency of Practice registration standard* but have not been practising on people? How will the Board know?**

If you do not meet the registration standards you must not say you do when renewing your registration.

The questions that you are asked, when you renew your registration, about meeting the standards are statutory declarations. It will be up to you, the individual practitioner, to provide evidence, at audit, or if a complaint is made about you, that you have met these standards.

The Board conducts random audits of physiotherapists against all of the Board's registration standards, including recency of practice.

If you make a false declaration and are audited, or a complaint is made about you, the consequences for your registration are likely to be different than if you were honest and had said you hadn't met the standard.

Making a false declaration could raise questions about your fitness to hold registration and doing so could have implications for your registration.

### **For more information**

- Go to the National Board's website: [www.physiotherapyboard.gov.au](http://www.physiotherapyboard.gov.au)
  - The Board's registration standards are published under *Registration standards*, and
  - FAQ, codes and guidelines on the standards are published under *Codes and guidelines*.
- For registration enquiries: 1300 419 495 (within Australia) +61 3 8708 9001 (overseas callers).