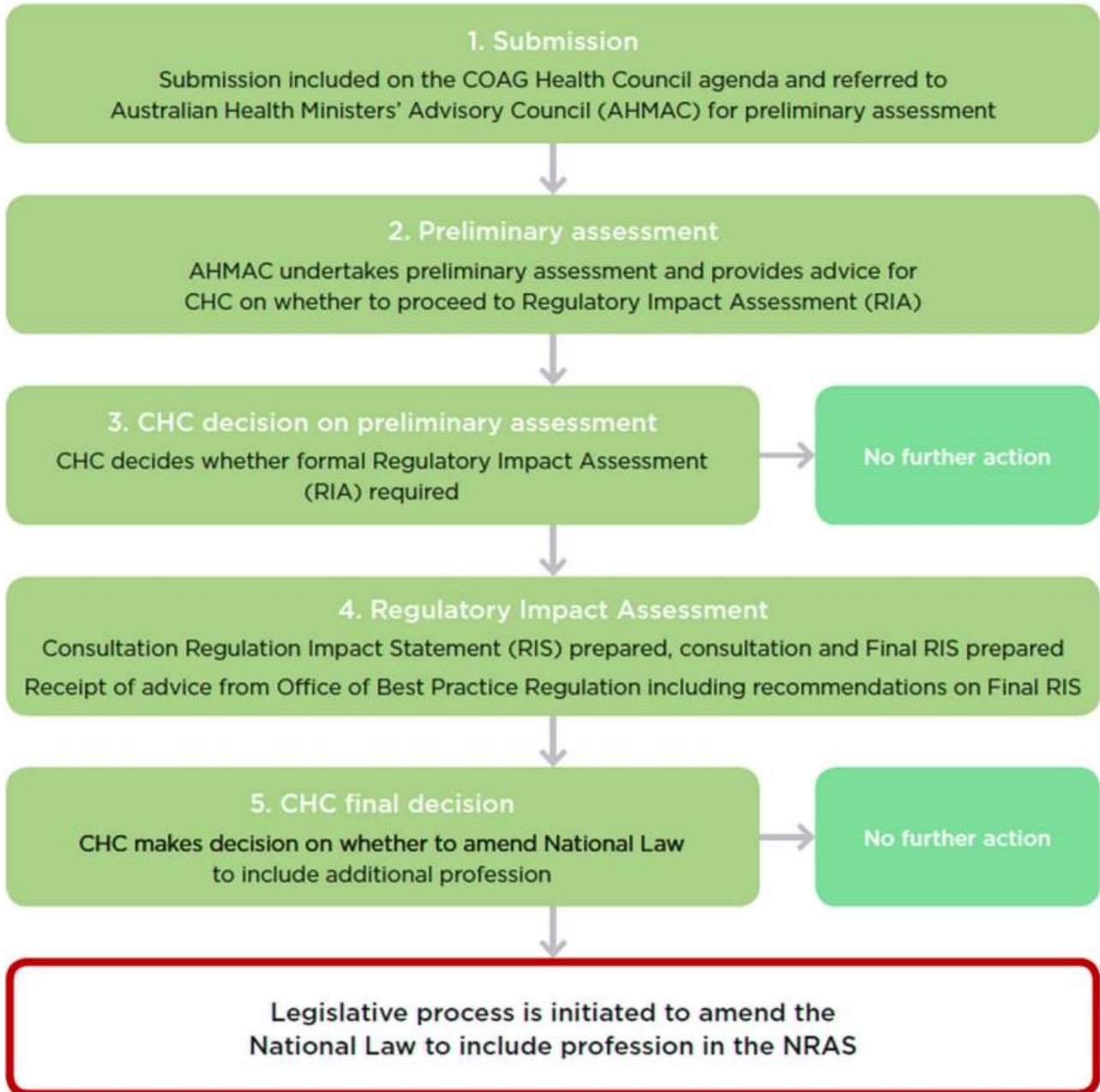


The COAG* Health Council process for considering the inclusion of additional professions in the NRAS



* the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) ceased on 29 May 2020, replaced by the new National Federation Reform Council (NFRC), with National Cabinet at the centre of the NFRC. The new arrangements for Health Ministers' meetings are yet to be announced.

Diagram reference: Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. *AHMAC information on regulatory assessment criteria and process for adding new professions to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the health professions*. Australian Government. Sep 2018



1. What is the process for achieving sonographer regulation?

Answer:

Achieving sonographer regulation is a complex process involving multiple stages.

Initially, a submission must be prepared that responds to six criteria established by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC), against which it will be assessed¹. The submission must demonstrate evidence of risk to the public, and clear benefits of regulation.

The six criteria are:

1. Is it appropriate for Health Ministers to exercise responsibility for regulating the occupation in question, or does the occupation more appropriately fall within the domain of another Ministry?
2. Do the activities of the occupation pose a significant risk of harm to the health and safety of the public?
3. Do existing regulatory or other mechanisms fail to address health and safety issues?
4. Is regulation possible to implement for the occupation in question?
5. Is regulation practical to implement for the occupation in question?
6. Do the benefits to the public of regulation clearly outweigh the potential negative impact of such regulation?

The AHMAC will assess the submission to ensure it meets the criteria, and then provide the Health Council, composed of Australian Health Ministers, with its preliminary assessment advice. Either:

- *No further action* – that a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is not warranted at this time.
- *Recommend a formal regulatory assessment* – that an RIA is warranted.

If there is sufficient evidence to justify undertaking an RIA, this process includes:

- preparing a consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS)
- conducting a national consultation, and finally
- preparing a final RIS in line with the COAG best practice regulation requirements.²

This work is usually managed by a lead jurisdiction(s) in partnership with the Office of Best Practice Regulation and can take many months to complete.

The final RIS report will make a recommendation on whether or not to add sonographers to the Medical Radiation Practitioners Board of Australia (MRPBA). If it is recommended the process of changing National Law would commence, together with any operational changes required to undertake the initial transition and continued inclusion of sonographers under the MRPBA.

Altogether, this process will take several years to complete.

¹ AHMAC *information on regulatory assessment criteria and process for adding new professions to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the health professions*. Australia. Sep 2018
<http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/NRAS>

² COAG. *Best Practice Regulation: A guide for Ministerial Councils and National Standard Setting Bodies*. Australia. Oct 2007. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/regulation/best-practice-regulation-guide-ministerial-councils-and-national-standard-setting-bodies>



2. What is the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)?

Answer:

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for health practitioners commenced on 1 July 2010. The NRAS has been established by state and territory governments through the introduction of consistent legislation in all jurisdictions (referred to as the National Law).

The aims of NRAS include:

- protecting the public by ensuring that only suitably trained and qualified practitioners are registered;
- facilitating workforce mobility across Australia; and
- enabling the continuous development of a flexible, responsive and sustainable Australian health workforce.³

The COAG Health Council is responsible for overseeing the NRAS. The National Law contains a definition of 'Ministerial Council' that refers to the COAG Health Council or its successor. When the COAG Health Council makes decisions under the National Law, it only involves ministers of the participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth who have portfolio responsibility for health.

Changes can be made to the NRAS. Any party to the Intergovernmental Agreement for a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the Health Professions (the Commonwealth, states and territories) may propose changes to the Ministerial Council for consideration.⁴ Further information on this is in the [AHMAC Guide to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme \(NRAS\) for health professions](#).

3. What does the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Agency (AHPRA) do?

Answer:

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is the statutory authority responsible for administering the NRAS. AHPRA is required to establish procedures for developing registration standards, accreditation standards and codes and guidelines to ensure that they are developed in accordance with good regulatory practice.

AHPRA works with the National Boards to regulate Australia's registered health practitioners under the NRAS, setting standards and policies that all registered health practitioners must meet. The Medical Radiation Practitioners Board of Australia (MRPBA) is one of 15 National Boards; and is responsible for regulating Medical Radiation Practitioners.

AHPRA's primary functions include:

- Assisting in the development of professional standards
- Managing registration and renewal processes, in partnerships with Boards
- Managing complaints and concerns raised about practitioners
- Monitoring and auditing practitioners against registration requirements
- Assisting with education accreditation standards and publishing a national register of practitioners.

More information on the role of AHPRA is online at www.ahpra.gov.au.

³ The Australian Government Department of Health Website. Accessed Nov 2020
<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-nras>

⁴ AHMAC. *Guide to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for health professions*. COAG Health Council. July 2018.



4. Who is the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia (MRPBA)?

Answer:

The Medical Radiation Practitioners Board of Australia (MRPBA) is one of 15 National Boards; and is responsible for regulating Medical Radiation Practitioners.

The MRPBA regulates the diagnostic radiographer, nuclear medicine technologist and radiation therapist professional divisions. The MRPBA is responsible for several functions, including:

- developing standards, codes and guidelines for the medical radiation profession
- approving accreditation standards and accredited courses of study
- registering medical radiation practitioners and students
- handling notifications, complaints, investigations and disciplinary hearings.

Further information about the functions, responsibilities and activities of the MRPBA is available through the website www.medicalradiationpracticeboard.gov.au.

5. Who is the Working Group for Sonographer Regulation?

Answer:

Established in 2018, the Working Group for Sonographer Regulation is a formal industry working group composed of the Australian Sonographers Association (ASA), the Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM), the Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR) and a senior sonographer representative.

The Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM) is a multidisciplinary society whose vision is to ensure quality health outcomes when using ultrasound. Its membership includes any healthcare practitioners who use ultrasound in clinical practice and research. It has over 3,500 members across Australia and New Zealand; approximately one-third of these are sonographers. ASUM provides an extensive range of education and standards, providing a highly respected and diverse profession with essential diagnostic ultrasound guidance for the best of patient care.

Website: www.asum.com.au

The Australian Sonographers Association (ASA), is the peak body for sonographers in Australasia. With almost 6,500 members, the ASA represents more than 70% of accredited sonographers across Australia. The ASA provides professional standards and protocols, including the ASA's Code of Professional Conduct for Sonographers, Standards of Practice, and Competency Standards for the Entry Level Sonographer.

Website: www.sonographers.org

The Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR) is the accreditation body for sonography education programs and maintains a register for all accredited sonographers for Medicare purposes. Any sonographers who provide Medicare-funded ultrasound examinations must be listed on the ASAR registry. There are currently: 20 accredited sonographer courses offered across Australia; 6,654 accredited medical sonographers and 1,073 student sonographers.

Website: www.asar.com.au