

Information for podiatrists returning to practice

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Background

Podiatrists and podiatric surgeons may require a period of absence from practising for a range of reasons.

When returning to practice after an absence, practitioners are required to comply with the requirements of the Podiatry Board of Australia's (the Board) *Recency of practice registration standard*.

The Board's role, as defined in the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (the National Law) as in force in each state and territory, includes protecting the public through the registration and regulation of podiatrists. The Board must be satisfied that all podiatry practitioners, including those wanting to return to practice after a period of absence, have the competence to practise safely.

Podiatrists and podiatric surgeons who seek to return to practice must meet the requirements for registration as set out in the National Law and the Board's registration standards.

This information sheet supports the Board's *Recency of practice registration standard* and provides information to practitioners returning to practice after an absence.

Scope

This information sheet should be read by practitioners who have *not practised for more than one year* and who wish to return to practice, whether or not they are already registered.

Procedure and requirements

A podiatrist applying for general registration or a podiatric surgeon applying for specialist registration must demonstrate that they are qualified, suitable and eligible for registration, including that he or she:

1. Is a suitable person for registration. That is, the practitioner does not have an impairment, a criminal history or professional disciplinary history that may impact on, or is relevant to his or her ability to practise
2. Meets the *Recency of practice registration standard*
3. Will meet the *Continuing professional development registration standard* during the period of registration
4. Meets the *Professional indemnity insurance registration standard* and
5. Meets any other registration standard or requirement of the Board.

When the Board considers an application for registration and where the applicant has been absent from practice for more than three years, the Board will take the following factors into consideration:

- length of absence from practice
- level of experience prior to the absence from practice
- any continuing professional development, education or professional contact maintained during the absence
- the intended scope of practice, including the role and position proposed.

Recency of practice registration standard

The following is a summary of the relevant sections of the Board's *Recency of practice registration standard*:

- **Less than 2 years experience and absent from practice for more than 12 months**

A practitioner returning to practice after an absence of more than 12 months, and who has had less than two years experience prior to the absence will have conditions placed on their registration to facilitate their return to safe professional practice.

- **2 years or more prior experience and absent from practice between one and three years**

A practitioner who has previously had more than two years experience but has not practised for between one and three years is required to complete a minimum of one year's quota of continuing professional development (CPD) activities in the 12 month period prior to returning to practice relevant to the intended scope of practice. The CPD activities must be designed to maintain and update knowledge, clinical judgment and technical skills.

The practitioner is required to provide evidence with their application of having met the minimum of one year's quota of continuing professional development activities relating to their intended scope of practice, targeted at maintaining and updating their knowledge, clinical judgement and technical skills.

The Board's *Guidelines for continuing professional development (Guidelines)* include information about the records you must keep of your CPD activities – see 7. *Recordkeeping* in the Guidelines. A sample template for keeping a record of CPD activities is published on the Board's website. Details of CPD activities completed in the 12 months prior to returning to practice can be submitted in the format outlined in the template. If you are using a different format for recording your CPD activities, you must ensure that your records include the details about your CPD activities as set out in the Guidelines.

- **2 years or more prior experience and absent from practice for more than three years**

A practitioner who has previously had more than two years experience but has not practised for more than three years is required to provide the Board with a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice. This may include a range of activities including working under supervision and completing specific education and/or assessment.

Plan for professional development and re-entry to practice

Practitioners who have previously had at least two years experience prior to the absence and are returning to practice after an *absence of more than three years* are required to submit for the Board's consideration a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice.

The purpose of a re-entry plan is to ensure that the practitioner is returning to safe practice with appropriate supports in place. This is for the safety of both patients and the practitioner.

The plan for professional development and re-entry to practice will be different for each practitioner. It should be tailored to the practitioner's particular circumstances and their individual learning needs. It is therefore not appropriate for the Board to issue a standard re-entry to practice plan with set tasks or supervision levels.

However, practitioners have sought assistance on how to develop a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice. This document provides a framework that a practitioner can use to guide them and provides information about the typical elements of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice.

Assistance in developing a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice may be obtained from:

- professional association
- prospective or past supervisors
- prospective employers/ colleagues and mentors

The content of a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should usually be negotiated with the prospective supervisor who is appropriately qualified in the area of intended practice. It should take into consideration:

1. The practitioner's specific learning needs, taking past education, experience and training into consideration; and
2. The requirements of the specific position that the practitioner is proposing to work in.

A plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should:

- nominate a proposed supervisor
- define the terms of an agreement between a proposed supervisor and the practitioner
- state the previous scope of practice and the intended scope of practice
- identify any gaps in knowledge and skills
- identify any training or education requirements that will be undertaken to meet learning requirements
- articulate goals, expected outcomes and clear timeframes for achievement of goals
- propose the level of supervision, mentoring or peer review that may be required for a safe return to practice
- describe the orientation process that the practitioner will undertake at the proposed employer's workplace
- allocate time for regular formal feedback or performance reviews by the proposed supervisor, with this feedback or review recorded and signed by the supervisor and the practitioner
- provide the anticipated completion date for the re-entry to practice plan
- articulate the measures that will be put in place if the stated goals are not achieved in the stated timeframes.

To assist practitioners, the Board has developed a re-entry plan template which makes provision for the elements that should be included in a plan for professional development and re-entry to practice. The template is published on the Board's website alongside this document. The plan, with the exception of the "Practitioner and Supervisor Agreement" may be modified or adapted to suit individual needs or replaced by a professional association re-entry plan.

Any supervision arrangements should be completed in line with the Board's Supervision Guidelines.

Consideration of the plan by the Board

It is a professional responsibility for podiatrists to work within their limits of competence. The Board expects that practitioners have the necessary level of insight to realise those limits of competence.

A plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should demonstrate to the Board that the practitioner (with assistance from prospective employers and/or supervisors, if relevant) has assessed their level of competence and has assessed their learning needs and how to meet those learning needs. The plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice should also demonstrate the structures that will be put in place, such as supervision, mentoring and regular feedback to ensure safe practice.

The Board may seek further information if it is not satisfied that the submitted plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice provides sufficient information about the safeguards for the return to practice and may require the practitioner to complete specific education and/or assessment.

The Board may also decide to formalise the re-entry to practice plan by imposing conditions or accepting an undertaking from the practitioner.

The Board will require the practitioner's supervisor/s to confirm that the practitioner has complied with the plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice. Before releasing the practitioner from the obligations of the plan, the Board may require that their supervisor confirms that the practitioner's practice is of a sufficient standard to satisfy the Board that they do not require the additional supports.

Auditing a practitioner's plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice

The Board may audit compliance with the plan for continuing professional development and for re-entry to practice at any time.