



Specialist titles: Transition provisions for Western Australia psychologists

15 November 2010

What is the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme?

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme came into effect in Australia on 1 July 2010 for all States and Territories except Western Australia. When Western Australia joined the scheme on 18 October 2010 the goal of a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme was achieved. For the first time, there are nationally consistent standards for registration and accreditation and psychologists can register once and practise anywhere in Australia.

The new National Scheme means there are new obligations and requirements for psychologists. Information about the new scheme and the implications for practitioners is published on the Board's website at www.psychologyboard.gov.au.

Psychologists in Western Australia will notice some changes in registration categories and specialist titles available under the National Scheme. While these changes won't affect your scope of practise, there is some new terminology to get used to.

What types of registration apply to psychology under the National Scheme?

For the psychology profession, there are now three registration types:

- general registration
- provisional registration
- non-practising registration

Under Section 13 (1) of the National Law¹ specialist registration is available for the medical profession and for the dentists division of the dental profession. Additionally specialist registration of podiatric surgeons has been approved by the Ministerial Council under Section 13(1)(c) of the National Law. However Ministerial Council has not approved specialist registration for psychologists and therefore there is no specialist register for psychology.

Instead, Ministerial Council approved seven endorsed areas of practice for psychology that correspond to the seven specialist title areas of practice that were available in Western Australia before 18 October 2010. When WA joined the national scheme on 18 October 2010, all Western Australian psychologists who had specialist registration on 17 October 2010 were automatically transferred to registration with the Psychology Board of Australia with the equivalent area of practice endorsement.

¹ The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009* as in force in each state and territory.

Legislation

Section 118 of the National Law prohibits the use of the title “specialist” by any practitioner who is not included on an approved specialist register. Given there is no approved specialist register for psychology, this section of the National Law prohibits all psychologists in Australia from using the title “specialist”. However a transitional provision has been included in section 281 of the National Law that specifically applies to Western Australia psychologists who previously held specialist registration in that State:

281 Protected titles for certain specialist health practitioners

- (1) This section applies if —
 - (a) immediately before the participation day for a participating jurisdiction, a person held specialist registration in a health profession in that jurisdiction; and
 - (b) on the participation day the health profession is not a profession for which specialist recognition operates under this Law.
- (2) Despite section 118, the person does not commit an offence during the transition period merely because the person takes or uses the —
 - (a) the title “specialist health practitioner”; or
 - (b) another title the person was entitled to use under the law of the participating jurisdiction as in force immediately before participation day.

Section 281 effectively provides an exemption from section 118 for a transition period of three years for psychologists in Western Australia who, on 17 October 2010 held specialist psychology registration.

It is important to note the wording of this provision. Although the National Law has provided a transition provision for use of titles such as “specialist psychologist”, it has not provided a transition provision for registration as a specialist psychologist. This is a technicality that does not affect your practice in any way, but means that you can use the title “specialist” but your name can’t be recorded on a specialist register.

What titles am I allowed to use?

During the transition period (until October 2013) you are permitted to describe yourself as a specialist in the specific area/s of practice in which you have an endorsement:

- “Specialist Clinical Psychologist”
- “Specialist Clinical Neuropsychologist”
- “Specialist Counselling Psychologist”
- “Specialist Educational and Developments Psychologist”
- “Specialist Forensic Psychologist”
- “Specialist Organisational Psychologist”
- “Specialist Sports Psychologist”

You can also use the following more general titles:

- “Specialist health practitioner“
- “Specialist psychologist“

You can also use the title related to your endorsement on its own without the preceding “specialist” if you wish, i.e. “Organisational Psychologist”. You will be allowed to continue to use that title after the end of the transition period and for as long as you maintain your area of practice endorsement.

How will people know that I am allowed to use the title “specialist”?

The National Register of Practitioners includes a notation on your registration that can be seen on the public register, for example:

“May use the title specialist clinical psychologist for three years after commencement day.”

You can check your notation on the website at:

<http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registers%20of%20Practitioners.aspx>

If there seem to be any problems with your notation or any of your other details on the public register please let us know so we can fix it for you. Ring AHPRA on **1300 419 495** or visit the website for further contact information:

<http://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-AHPRA/Contact-Us.aspx>

Why is this note recorded under “notations” instead of “specialties”?

The public register is the Register of Practitioners is the register of all 10 professions currently regulated in the National Scheme. Some categories on the public register do not apply to practitioners in all health professions, such as specialties and endorsements. All psychologists automatically have “none” under “specialties” because there is no specialist psychology register. The “notations” category however enables AHPRA to provide extra information about a practitioner, such as special transition provisions.

How long am I allowed to keep using the title “specialist”?

In section 281 the National Law states that the transition period means the period –

- (a) starting at the beginning of the commencement day; and
- (b) ending at the end day that is 3 years after the commencement day

For Western Australians this means the transition period is from 18 October 2010 until 18 October 2013.

After 18 October 2013 you will no longer be able to use the word “specialist” in your title. However, you can still use the title related to your area of practice endorsement/s i.e. “Counselling Psychologist”.

You need to use this transition period to prepare for 19 October 2013 when you won’t be allowed to use the word “specialist” in your title at all. Make sure that by 18 October 2013 all your business cards, office signage, advertising and office stationery are up to date and not displaying the title “specialist” at all.

From 19 October 2013 Section 118 of the National Law will apply to all practitioners. The use of the title “specialist” will constitute an offence which incurs a maximum penalty of \$30,000 for individuals.