



ATMS
Australian Traditional-
Medicine Society



White Paper 1

The Australian Health
Regulatory Framework

What ATMS Members Need to Know

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Executive Summary

This white paper offers an in-depth exploration of the national framework that governs the safety, efficacy, and integrity of therapeutic products, services, and practitioners.

It outlines the historical development of this regulatory system, highlights the roles of key authorities, and explains how they interact to uphold high-quality healthcare standards across the country.



Annie Gibbins
Chief Executive Officer.

Importantly, it examines the intersection between registered and self-regulated professions, shedding light on how members of the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS) contribute to a safe and ethical healthcare system through robust self-regulation and professional accountability.

Put simply, understanding how your profession fits within Australia's health regulatory framework is essential for maintaining compliance, credibility, and public trust.



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1. Introduction

Australia's health regulatory framework protects public health and safety by ensuring healthcare practitioners, services, and products adhere to the highest professional standards. Understanding the regulatory landscape is key to practising responsibly and legally for both registered and self-regulated practitioners.

This white paper explores:

- The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme ([NRAS](#))
- The functions of key national regulators: [AHPRA](#), [TGA](#), [ACCC](#), and [NHMRC](#)
- The responsibilities of self-regulated professions and how ATMS supports and governs these practitioners

With this knowledge, ATMS members will be equipped to maintain best practice, meet legal and ethical obligations, and deliver consistent, client-centred care.



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2. Historical Background of the National Law

2.1 Fragmented Regulation Before 2010

Prior to the introduction of a unified system, healthcare practitioner regulation in Australia was managed independently by each state and territory. This decentralised approach led to inconsistent standards, duplication of effort, and a lack of mobility for health professionals. With over 85 separate registration boards in place, public safety and practitioner accountability were variable.

2.2 The Birth of National Regulation

In response to these challenges, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the creation of a single national scheme. The result was the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (the National Law), enacted in 2010, which introduced the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS).

NRAS established a uniform framework for registering practitioners, accrediting training programs, setting standards, and handling complaints and disciplinary actions. The scheme promotes consistency, transparency, and accountability in health practitioner regulation across all jurisdictions.



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2.3 Expansion of Regulated Professions

NRAS originally covered 12 professions. By 2025, 16 health professions are regulated through 15 National Boards, supported by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency ([AHPRA](#)):

- Chiropractic
- Dental practitioners (incl. hygienists, prosthetists, therapists)
- Medical practitioners
- Nurses and midwives
- Optometrists
- Osteopaths
- Pharmacists
- Physiotherapists
- Podiatrists
- Psychologists
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners
- Chinese medicine practitioners
- Medical radiation practitioners
- Occupational therapists
- Paramedics

All regulated practitioners must meet mandatory requirements for education, ethical conduct, and continuing professional development.



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Under the National Law, a profession is only included in the AHPRA-regulated scheme if it meets specific criteria, most importantly, that the profession poses a demonstrable risk of harm to the public if not regulated. This public health risk threshold is used to justify the need for statutory oversight. While many professions fall outside this scope, it does not mean they are risk-free. Instead, it places greater importance on self-regulation, ethical codes, and consumer protections, particularly for practitioners in the natural medicine sector.

*“AHPRA regulation is reserved for professions that pose a demonstrable risk to public health. That doesn’t mean others are risk-free; it means self-regulation matters more than ever.”
— Annie Gibbins, CEO, ATMS*



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3. Key Regulatory Bodies in Australia's Health System

The regulation of Australia's healthcare sector is a shared responsibility, involving several key agencies. These bodies collectively ensure that healthcare professionals and products meet national safety and efficacy standards.

3.1 Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)

AHPRA oversees practitioner registration and enforces standards set by the National Boards. It ensures that registered practitioners are qualified, ethical, and competent.

Key Responsibilities:

- Registration and renewal
- Enforcement of professional standards
- Investigation of complaints and misconduct

www.ahpra.gov.au



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3.2 Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)

The TGA is part of the Department of Health and is responsible for regulating medicines, medical devices, and complementary healthcare products.

Key Responsibilities:

- Pre-market assessment and approval
- Post-market surveillance and safety alerts
- Enforcement of regulatory compliance

www.tga.gov.au

3.3 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)

The ACCC monitors health-related advertising and ensures businesses comply with consumer law.

Key Responsibilities:

- Preventing misleading health product claims
- Enforcing the Australian Consumer Law (ACL)
- Supporting informed consumer choice

www.accc.gov.au



3.4 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)

The NHMRC supports health research and provides national evidence-based guidelines for practitioners and policymakers.

Key Responsibilities:

- Granting research funding
- Issuing clinical practice guidelines
- Shaping national health strategies

 www.nhmrc.gov.au





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4. Self-Regulated Professions and the Role of ATMS

4.1 The National Code for Unregulated Professions

Many healthcare professions not covered under NRAS are self-regulated. These practitioners are bound by the National Code of Conduct for Healthcare Workers, which sets baseline standards for safe and ethical care.

Implementation Status (as of July 2025):

- Enacted: [NSW](#), [QLD](#), [VIC](#), [SA](#), [ACT](#), [WA](#),
- Passed but pending proclamation: [TAS](#) (2024)
- Not yet enacted: [NT](#)

[National Code - NSW Health Care Complaints Commission](#)



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4.2 ATMS and the Importance of Self-Regulation

The Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS) represents practitioners across a diverse range of modalities. Some are AHPRA-registered; others operate under self-regulation, governed by ATMS' stringent Code of Conduct and ethical requirements.

ATMS-supported modalities include:

- Acupuncture (AHPRA-regulated)
- Aromatherapy
- Ayurvedic Medicine
- Bowen Therapy
- Chinese Herbal Medicine (AHPRA-regulated)
- Chinese Massage
- Counselling
- Chiropractic (AHPRA-regulated)
- Herbal Medicine
- Homeopathy
- Hypnotherapy
- Kinesiology
- Myotherapy
- Naturopathy
- Nutrition
- Osteopathy (AHPRA-regulated)
- Reflexology
- Massage Therapy
- Remedial Massage
- Shiatsu
- Thai Massage



ATMS ensures all members, regardless of regulatory status, practise safely, ethically, and professionally. Members are required to undertake CPD, hold current insurance, and adhere to clinical and professional standards.

4.3 ATMS Code of Conduct

The ATMS Code of Conduct aligns with national expectations and mandates a high standard of care.

Key Principles:

- Safe & Ethical Practice – Practice within scope and competence.
- Infectious Conditions – Modify or pause care when unwell.
- No False Claims – No unsubstantiated or misleading therapeutic claims.
- Infection Control – Maintain hygiene and follow regulations.
- Respect for Other Practitioners – Promote collaborative care.
- Fitness to Practice – Avoid impairment from substances or illness.
- No Financial Exploitation – Ethical billing and service delivery.
- Evidence-Based Practice – Treatment must have clinical justification.
- Transparency – Be honest about qualifications and services.
- Professional Boundaries – Avoid personal relationships with clients.
- Accurate Record Keeping – Maintain complete and secure notes.
- Professional Insurance – Maintain appropriate indemnity coverage.
- Privacy Protection – Comply with relevant privacy laws.
- Public Display – Display the Code and complaint processes in clinic and online.

This Code safeguards clients, protects the reputation of the profession, and demonstrates the leadership of ATMS in upholding national standards.



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5. Conclusion

Australia's health regulatory framework is designed to protect patients, guide professional behaviour, and ensure the delivery of high-quality, ethical healthcare.

ATMS plays a vital role in representing self-regulated professions and ensuring its members uphold nationally recognised standards. Through active self-regulation, professional development, and a robust Code of Conduct, ATMS members continue to deliver trusted care within an evolving healthcare landscape.

Understanding this framework empowers ATMS practitioners to remain compliant, credible, and confident contributors to Australia's healthcare future.

Our vision is a healthcare system where every qualified traditional medicine practitioner, whether self-regulated or registered, is respected, accountable, and empowered to deliver safe, high-quality care.” — Annie Gibbins, CEO, ATMS



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5. About the ATMS

The Australian Traditional-Medicine Society (ATMS) is the leading professional association for natural medicine practitioners in Australia. Founded in 1984, the ATMS has been at the forefront of advocating for, supporting, and promoting high standards in natural healthcare for over 40 years. Our members include accredited practitioners, students, and industry professionals committed to delivering safe, effective, and evidence-informed natural medicine.

As a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation, the ATMS is dedicated to ensuring professionalism, ethical practice, and continued education within the natural medicine industry. We engage with government bodies, regulatory agencies, and industry partners to advance the recognition of natural medicine and advocate for policies that support our members and the wider community.

ATMS exists to:

- Promote natural medicine as a vital part of Australia's healthcare system.
- Represent practitioners at all levels of government, industry, and regulation.
- Support members by providing education, professional development, and advocacy.
- Encourage the highest standards of professionalism and ethical practice.



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We believe in freedom of choice in healthcare and work to ensure that natural medicine remains accessible, recognised, and respected.

OUR VALUES

Integrity

- We build trust through responsible action.
- We embrace freedom of choice and respect diversity in healthcare.

Excellence

- We strive for the highest standards in practice, education, and research.
- We continuously adapt, learn, and grow to meet the evolving needs of our members.

Leadership

- We advocate, collaborate, and engage with government and industry stakeholders.
- We aspire to lead through innovation, research, and professional support.

Passion

- We believe in the power of natural medicine to improve lives.
- We honour traditional principles while embracing evidence-informed practice.

Member-Focused

- We prioritise the growth, success, and recognition of our members.
- Our members are at the heart of everything we do.



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6. Contact Us

 Website
atms.com.au

 Phone
1800 456 855

 Address
80 Chandos Street, Crows Nest, NSW, 2065

 E-mail
info@atms.com.au

 Social Media
[@naturalmedicineau](https://www.instagram.com/naturalmedicineau)



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