



Specialist Medical Education and Training and  
Continuing Professional Development  
Programmes:

Standards for Recognition of Vocational  
Scopes of Practice in New Zealand

**STAGE 1**

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The Medical Council of New Zealand acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Medical Council in preparing these Standards.

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## Introduction

The Medical Council of New Zealand (the Council) is responsible for the registration of doctors in New Zealand under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA). The HPCAA requires Council to prescribe the scopes of practice which doctors are permitted to perform. The Council has prescribed three broad scopes of practice – general, vocational and special purpose and has recognised 36 vocational scopes of practice. Within vocational scopes of practice, the specialist develops significant expertise within a specific domain or branch of medical practice and research. The legal definition of a “vocational scope of practice” provides a framework within which Council is able to ensure that doctors are competence within a specialised field of medicine.

The Council has a joint memorandum of understanding on a common accreditation process with the Australian Medical Council for those training organizations providing training and recertification programmes in both Australia and New Zealand. The Council has also introduced a similar set of accreditation standards for training organisations based solely in New Zealand. However the legal and medical context in which areas of practice are recognised as separate specialist or vocational scopes are different between Australia and New Zealand. The process for initial recognition of vocational scopes of practice described in this document remains unique to New Zealand

### Standards for Recognition

To be recognised as a vocational scope of practice, the applicant body must meet the Council’s criteria specified in the Standards for recognition of vocational scopes of practice.

The recognition criteria have been devised to assess whether ongoing developments and innovations in medical care warrant formal recognition of a discipline as a distinct specialty within the context of the New Zealand health system and medical education sector. The criteria have also been designed to distinguish between a distinct medical specialty and what more usefully should be regarded as a ‘special clinical interest’.

A guiding principle of the recognition process is that the New Zealand community and health system are better served by avoiding unnecessary fragmentation of medical knowledge, skills and medical care. As is clear from criteria 1 to 4, the onus is placed on the applicant to demonstrate that the benefits of specialisation in a particular field of medicine outweigh the potential costs, and present evidence to this effect.

### The process of application

The overall process has two stages.

Stage 1 requires the applicant to address the broader issues of establishing a new vocational scope of practice. Stage 2 is the process of assessing the organisation’s training and recertification programme. The capacity of the professional organisation representing the discipline to fill the role of setting and assessing standards in the discipline, and overseeing a postgraduate program of training, education and assessment is considered to be central to a successful application. This is made clear in criterion 3 of the recognition criteria. While the Council will not make a full assessment of the training and education program until Stage 2, the applicant will need to demonstrate its potential capacity in this area during Stage 1.

Section 14 of the HPCAA requires Council to consult with health practitioners and organisations who may be affected by the proposal to recognise a new vocational scope. In accordance with this requirement, a

consultation request will be sent to all relevant stakeholders and will include copies of the application. Two months will be allowed for consultation.

As part of the Stage 1 recognition process, the applicant is required to specify the name of the proposed scope of practice, provide a brief description of it and specify the qualification or qualifications for that scope of practice.

If the application successfully passes both stages, the Council will publish by notice in the New Zealand Gazette the name of the scope and its description and prescribed qualifications.

## **Criteria for the Recognition of a Vocational Scope of Practice in New Zealand.**

The application for recognition of a vocational scope of practice will be assessed against the following criteria.

### **1. THE PROPOSED VOCATIONAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE IS WELL DEFINED AND GROUNDED IN WIDELY RECOGNISED MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONCEPTS**

- 1.1 The proposed vocational scope is a well-defined and distinct field of medicine.
- 1.2 The proposed vocational scope represents a widely accepted field of medical practice, for example as indicated by:
  - A comprehensive and developing body of international research and scholarly literature to support evidence based clinical practice.
  - Significant representation within academic medicine.
  - Formal recognition as a medical specialty (or other relevant category) in comparable countries.

### **2. THE PROPOSED VOCATIONAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE WILL CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVEMENTS IN THE QUALITY AND SAFETY OF HEALTH CARE AND ADDRESS INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH CARE.**

- 2.1. The proposed scope has or will improve the quality of healthcare in New Zealand by improving health outcomes and increasing the safety of care across the following dimensions:
  - increased effectiveness of health care as defined by improved health outcomes
  - how, if the proposed new scope already exists as a sub-specialty, elevation to a scope of practice will increase the quality of health care.
  - increased appropriateness of health care as defined by providing care relevant to the patient's needs and based on established standards
  - service sustainability and the need for holistic and seamless service for consumers
  - increased safety of care (e.g. significant reduction of harm experienced as a result of receiving healthcare).
- 2.2 The proposed scope fits with the New Zealand Health Strategy. This Strategy identifies seven fundamental principles:
  - acknowledging the special relationship between Maori and the Crown under the Treaty of Waitangi
  - good health and wellbeing for all people in New Zealand throughout their lives

- an improvement in health status of those currently disadvantaged
- collaborative health promotion and disease and injury prevention by all sectors
- timely and equitable access for all people in New Zealand to a comprehensive range of health and disability services, regardless of ability to pay
- a high-performing system in which people have confidence
- active involvement of consumers and communities at all levels.

2.3 The proposed vocational scope is of public health significance (there is a significant burden of disease, incidence, prevalence or impact on the community).

### **3. THE PROPOSED VOCATIONAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE HAS A DEMONSTRABLE AND SUSTAINABLE BASE IN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION, INDICATED BY A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF PRACTITIONERS:**

- 3.1 The applicant has, or is very likely to have within a defined time period, a sufficient number of practitioners:
- with capacity to meet existing clinical need
  - who possess the knowledge and skills of practise in the specialty, and who practise predominantly in the specialty
  - to sustain activities such as vocational training, assessment and recertification.
- 3.2 There will be a future need for specialist-level skills and knowledge in this area of medicine. Projections should be provided.

### **4. RECOGNITION OF THE VOCATIONAL SCOPE WOULD BE A WISE USE OF RESOURCES**

- 4.1 Any similar existing or overlapping scopes should be identified with the extent of this overlap.
- 4.2 Specialisation will not adversely affect the quality of healthcare in New Zealand, and will not in the future, by promoting:
- the unnecessary fragmentation of medical knowledge and skills (e.g. where this serves to increase the risk of medical errors and/or inefficient or inappropriate care)
  - the unnecessary fragmentation of medical care (e.g. where patients are required to see multiple practitioners for care at a significant coordination cost)
  - the unnecessary de-skilling of other medical practitioners (e.g. General Practitioners and other primary health care providers)
  - inequitable access to health care as defined by socioeconomic status, geography or culture.
- 4.3 Where the specialist medical services are already provided or could be provided by practitioners in a recognised specialty or a combination of recognised specialty groupings, provision of these services by this new specialty will enhance the quality of health care and/or efficiency of healthcare.

Applicants with few members working within the proposed vocational scope of practice will need to persuasively demonstrate that administrative requirements can be managed practically.

- 4.4 The applicant is aware of the potential risks of creating a new scope. Provide evidence of development of strategies to minimise this risk.

## **IDENTIFY THE PROPOSED DEFINITION OF THE NEW VOCATIONAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE AND THE PROPOSED PRESCRIBED QUALIFICATION**

The applicant is required to:

- Name and succinctly describe the proposed scope of practice. A scope of practice can be described in one or more of the following ways (HPCAA s 11):
  - by reference to a name or form of words that is commonly understood by persons who work in the health sector:
  - by reference to an area of science or learning:
  - by reference to tasks commonly performed:
  - by reference to illnesses or conditions to be diagnosed, treated, or managed
- Designate one or more of the following qualifications for the scope of practice (HPCAA s12):
  - a degree or diploma of a stated kind from an educational institution accredited by the authority, whether in New Zealand or abroad, or an educational institution of a stated class, whether in New Zealand or abroad:
  - the successful completion of a degree, course of studies, or programme accredited by the authority:
  - a pass in a specified examination or any other assessment set by the authority or by another organisation approved by the authority:
  - registration with an overseas organisation that performs functions that correspond wholly or partly to those performed by the authority:
  - experience in the provision of health services of a particular kind, including, without limitation, the provision of such services at a nominated institution or class of institution, or under the supervision or oversight of a nominated health practitioner or class of health practitioner.

