15 May 2026

Janet Lee
Coroner's Registrar
Coroner's Support Services,
Coroner's Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Via email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Registrar Lee,

Investigation into the death of Catherine Lynch (COR 2022 003659)

On behalf of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the Psychology Board of Australia (the Board), we acknowledge the finding into the death of Catherine Lynch. We extend our deepest condolences to the family, friends, kin, and community affected by Catherine's passing.

Ahpra and the 15 National Boards recognise that family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) is a significant and widespread problem with serious and lasting impacts upon individuals, families and communities.

National Boards and Ahpra regulate over 980,000 health practitioners in sixteen professions through the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme). Our primary role is to protect the public by ensuring Australians have access to a qualified, competent and safe health workforce. We are committed to responding to FDSV in our capacity as regulators, having published a joint statement that reinforces the importance of the health workforce in identifying and responding to FDSV and also the consequences for health practitioners who perpetrate FDSV.

We note the recommendations made under section 72(2) of the *Coroners Act 2008* (Vic) (the Act), and appreciate the opportunity to respond to recommendation (2) and (3):

> *2) That the Psychology Board of Australia explicitly recognise in the Professional Competencies for Psychologists that competency in family violence risk assessment and management is relevant to all practice settings and explicitly outline an expectation that all psychologists are competent in family violence identification, assessment and management.*
>
> *3) That the Psychology Board of Australia consider this finding and include mandatory education on family violence identification, assessment and management in their recommendations to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing on the redesign of the psychology higher education pathway.*

On behalf of the Board, I provide this written response to the recommendation, in accordance with the requirements under sections 72(3) and 72(4) of the Act.

In response to the recommendations the Board confirms that alternative recommendations have been, or plan to be, implemented.

Professional Competencies for Psychologists

Current competency requirements in place regarding FDSV

Psychologists in Australia practise in a regulatory framework established by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The Board has powers under the National Law to develop standards, codes and guidelines about the eligibility of individuals for registration in the psychology profession.

National competency-based benchmarks are used across the health professions in the National Scheme, to ensure that only suitably qualified and competent people in the health profession are registered. The Board establishes the benchmarks for safe and effective practice as a psychologist in Australia, and these competencies define the essential knowledge, skills, and professional attributes required for safe and effective psychological practice.

Since commencement of the National Scheme in 2010, the competencies for general registration have been deliberately high level across 8 competency domains, to reflect that psychologists practice in a range of work settings not limited to seeing patients/clients. While assessment of risk to self and others has been implicit in the training of psychologists, it was not explicitly stated in the competencies.

On 1 December 2025 the Board released revised *Professional Competencies for Psychologists* (Professional competencies).These new Professional competencies include Competency 5, which contains specific reference to psychologists being able to conduct a range of culturally safe interventions that maximise optimal outcomes with clients, and that identify and manage clients who are vulnerable or at risk to self or others.

This means the Board requires competency in a range of risk assessment and management scenarios as a threshold for achieving and maintaining general registration as a psychologist.

For psychologists with general registration, they must complete a learning needs analysis against the new professional competencies and develop an annual learning plan to maintain their individual scope of practice. The individual's scope of practice is dependent on their work role.

The *CPD Registration Standard* recognises and supports flexibility for practitioners to work across a variety of practice settings. For psychologists working in settings where family violence is likely to be a component of a client's presentation, the Professional competencies include the expectation that psychologists are competent to recognise risk, respond appropriately and refer on to specialist assistance.

National Scheme professional capabilities framework

While the Professional competencies for psychologists do not explicitly reference FDSV, the Ahpra Board's Accreditation Committee is leading multi-profession work to develop and pilot a framework for common professional capabilities in priority areas, including FDSV. The project aims to respond to recommendations from multiple government reports that have identified the need to develop workforce capability in priority areas for registered health practitioners.

The *National Scheme Professional Capabilities Framework* is designed to complement and sit alongside profession-specific capabilities (like the Professional competencies for psychologists), outlining different levels of expected FDSV capability dependent on scope of practice.

The project is currently in a confidential phase of consultation, after which it will move into a public consultation phase.

Review of the Professional competencies for psychologists

As outlined in the Consultation process of the National Boards, the Board regularly reviews its registration standards, codes and guidelines as part of good regulatory practice. Changes to standards, codes and guidelines are conducted through a public consultation process. The Board has recommended a review of the *Professional competencies for psychologists* starting five years after implementation (see Professional competencies p10) in order to maintain their relevance to the expectations of threshold competence required for contemporary psychology practice in Australia.

At this time, we will be able to consult on the Coroner's recommendation to explicitly include in the Professional competency in family violence risk assessment and management.

This timeframe for review will allow for a simultaneous inclusion of a broader assessment of the performance of the Professional competencies which have only be in effect for four months (since 1 December 2025). It will also allow us to understand how the Professional competencies perform alongside the National Scheme common professional capabilities framework.

Additional Measures Undertaken or Planned in Response to the Recommendation

Communication with the profession

The Board's October 2025 newsletter to all registered psychologists specifically included information on FDSV and encouraged integration of training that deepens knowledge of FDSV into psychologist's CPD planning, particularly where it supports the development of Competency 5 in the revised Professional competencies.

Psychology higher degree redesign project

As Coroner Giles noted in recommendation (3), the Board, under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), has been asked by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department) to recommend changes to the six-year psychology training pathway.

Outlined in the Consultation paper (consultation open from April to June 2026), the proposed degree model in this Higher Degree Redesign project would create opportunities to expand the psychology curriculum to focus on domestic and family violence, cultural responsiveness, and interprofessional practice competencies. This reform (if implemented) would require changes to training timeframes, course structure, training pedagogy, and necessitate changes to the Accreditation standards for psychology programs (see the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council).

It should be noted that the project is in the consultation phase and a final report to the Department is due at the end of 2026. Implementation of any recommendations, including the proposed model, and associated timelines would then be considered by the Department.

If you have any queries regarding the response provided, please contact Sophie Dunstone, Executive Officer – Psychology.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Phillips
Chair, Psychology Board of Australia