

Podiatrists Registration Board of Tasmania – Orientation Manual

What is the Podiatrists Registration Board?

The Podiatrist Registration Board is established under the Podiatrists Registration Act 1995. The Board's overarching mandate is to regulate the profession of podiatry in the public interest. The functions, powers and objectives of the Board are detailed in the Act. The Board's main regulatory functions are:

- to determine the requirements for entitlement for registration in Tasmania
- to investigate complaints against registered podiatrists
- to monitor the standard and provision of podiatric services.

The Board comprises three members who are registered podiatrists and two persons who are not podiatrists. All members are appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Minister for Health and Human Services for terms not exceeding three years.

What is Podiatry?

Podiatry deals with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of medical and surgical conditions of the feet and lower limbs. The conditions podiatrists treat include those resulting from bone and joint disorders such as arthritis and soft-tissue and muscular pathologies, as well as neurological and circulatory disease. Podiatrists are also able to diagnose and treat any complications of the above which affect the lower limb, including skin and nail disorders, corns, calluses and ingrown toenails. Foot injuries and infections gained through sport or other activities are also diagnosed and treated by podiatrists.

A range of skills are employed by podiatrists. Direct consultations include a clinical history composition, physical examination, diagnosis, preparation of a treatment plan and provision of a range of therapies. Clinical assessment techniques aim to secure a diagnosis and prognosis and take into account clinical, medical and surgical history, footwear, occupational and lifestyle factors, and may incorporate the use of diagnostic equipment such as vasculoscopes or radiology. Gait analysis will often be undertaken through visual or computerised means and might include range of motion studies, postural alignment evaluation or dynamic force and pressure studies.

Clinical services require skilled use of sterilised instruments and appropriate infection control procedures, along with appropriate application of pharmacological agents, specialist wound dressings and a variety of physical therapies. Prescription foot orthoses (in-shoe devices) offer permanent solutions in the treatment and prevention of corns, callous and necrotic ulceration in their capacity to provide pressure redistribution. As a technique for providing consistent weightbearing realignment they are utilised in the treatment of acute and chronic foot conditions such as tendonitis, recurrent ankle sprain, chronic knee pain and stress fractures, to supplement and enhance clinical care.

Professional Bodies (Australian Podiatry Association – Tasmania and the Australasian Podiatry Council)

The Australian Podiatry Association – Tasmania is the professional representative body for podiatrists in Tasmania about 80% of registered podiatrists are members of the Association. The Australasian Podiatry Council is the national body and consists of the affiliated state and territory associations and the New Zealand association. The role of the Council and State Associations includes;

- Organisation of continuing education programs for podiatrists.
- Promotion of podiatry as a profession and a community service.
- Setting competency standards for the profession including an Accredited Podiatrist Program.
- Accreditation of Undergraduate training courses.
- Support and promote research by podiatrists.

The role and function of the Board and Association are different. However, both bodies share a common aim of ensuring high standard podiatry services in Tasmania. Whereas registration with the Board is a requirement by law, membership of the Association is not compulsory.

Podiatry Education in Australia

Training for podiatrists in Australia is through four-year undergraduate courses at the following institutions. There is no course of training available in Tasmania.

University of South Australia
University of Western Sydney – Macarthur
LaTrobe University
Queensland University of Technology
Curtin University of Technology
Charles Sturt University

The Podiatrists Registration Act 1995

An Act for the registration of podiatrists was first enacted in 1974. There was a major review during 1994 and during 2001 there were a number of amendments and updates to the Act.

The Act sets out in detail information about the Board and registration of podiatrists. Its content is expressed clearly and it is recommended that Board members read in detail. The Act is divided into seven parts.

Part 1 Preliminary

Includes the date of commencement of the Act and the interpretive definitions used in the Act.

Part 2 Podiatrists Registration Board

Sets out details of the membership of the Board, its powers and functions, committees of the Board, employees, protection from liability and financial matters.

Part 3 Registration

Includes the requirements for registration, determining entitlement for registration, granting of registration, maintaining a register including requirements for maintaining annual registration.

Part 4 Discipline

Details of who may make complaints against a registered podiatrist, investigation of complaints, action that may be taken by the Board including suspension of registration.

Part 5 Appeals

The right of appeal and hearing of appeals.

Part 6 Offences

Offences by unregistered persons, general offences by podiatrists including unauthorised use of scheduled substances, dishonesty, obstruction etc.

Part 7 Miscellaneous

Includes obligations on individuals to provide information and administrative and legal provision.

Schedules 1-5

Provisions relating to membership of the Board, conduct of Board meetings and conduct of committees of inquiry and disciplinary committees.

Facts about Regulation

Regulation may be defined as the forms and processes whereby order, consistency and control are brought to a profession and its practice. In the context of professional governance, regulation is responsible for defining and describing the practice of the profession, including the requirements necessary for practise.

While the main purpose of professional regulation is the protection of the public's health and interest, professions and their members benefit from regulation by the establishment of guidelines and standards for practice and the development of standards for educational preparation. The public interest purpose of regulation can generally be said to emanate from two societal values. These values are:

- Consumers rights must be protected and promoted; and
- The public lacks the specialised knowledge necessary to accurately determine the service being purchased.

In general terms, the responsibility of the Board is to all times act in the public's interest. Whilst this may seem a concept that is difficult to define, the overriding principle is that the Board's focus for decision making must be balanced on the broader public interest (ie. what is in the interest of the greater public health as it relates to podiatry); even if as a result there may be a perceived negative outcome for the profession.

The public interest has been defined in various ways including:

- “something which is of serious concern or benefit to the public.” (British Steel Corporation v Granada Television Lts (1980) 3 WLR 780)
- “an ill defined or amorphous concept that eludes definition even by jurists and whose meaning may vary at the whim of a Minister or Official.” (Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs 1979 Report on the Freedom of Information Bill 1978 para 5.21)
- “a convenient and useful concept for aggregating any number of interests that may bear upon a disputed question that is of general – as opposed to merely private – concern.” (Senate Committee Report 1979 (ibid) para 5.25)

Information about Podiatrists in Tasmania

In December 2002 there were sixty three registered podiatrists in Tasmania. These persons work in a variety of settings including:

- private practice
- public hospitals
- community health centres
- nursing homes
- home visits

Approximately two thirds (41) of the registered podiatrists in Tasmania are female. The registered workforce is also relatively young as indicated in the following age profile. The vast majority of these persons are new or recent graduates in Podiatry. As there is no training available for podiatrists in Tasmania a large proportion of those registered are from interstate.

Age Group	Number
20-29 years	25
30-39 years	19
40-49 years	11
50-59 years	5
60+ years	3

Who is entitled to Registration in Tasmania?

The requirements for registration are laid out in Sections 19-21 of the Act. In general the Board recognises the following categories.

- podiatrists who have successfully completed one of the undergraduate courses in podiatry conducted by Australian Universities.
- podiatrists who are registered in another Australian State or New Zealand who meet the requirements of the Mutual Recognition Act 1992 as the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act.
- overseas trained podiatrists who meet the requirements of the Australian Podiatry Council.

It is a requirement of registration that podiatrists maintain professional indemnity cover and evidence of such cover must be provided prior to the issue of an annual practising certificate.