

Facing a regulatory complaint: A step-by-step support tool



First things first – take a breath

Receiving a notification from Ahpra or another regulator can be one of the more stressful moments in your professional life. It's normal to feel anxious, frustrated or unsettled. Many practitioners describe this as deeply personal – particularly when you've dedicated yourself to your patients and their care. This can feel like a direct challenge to your integrity and competence.

Here's what you need to know right now: **you are not alone, and you don't need to manage this on your own.**

Most doctors will face a complaint at some point in their career. This is not a reflection of poor practice – it is simply a reality of modern medical life. The system exists to protect the public, and in most cases, complaints are resolved without serious outcomes and consequences.

What is a notification?

A notification is a formal complaint or concern lodged with Ahpra or another regulatory authority. It may come from a patient, family member, another practitioner, employer or health service.

It's important to understand what this means and what it **doesn't**.

A notification **is**:

- a formal process to assess concerns about patient safety
- an opportunity to explain your clinical reasoning and decisions
- a common part of professional practice
- something most practitioners navigate successfully.

A notification **is not**:

- a finding that you have done something wrong
- a judgement about your competence or character
- something you need to manage alone.

Your immediate action plan

1. Contact Avant

This is the single most important step.

Call Avant's medico-legal advisory team as soon as you receive a notification. There are strict timeframes, and early advice will help you respond appropriately. You will be supported by Avant's medico-legal experts who manage these matters every day.

2. If the regulator calls you

Regulators often make initial contact by phone before written details are sent. If this happens:

- stay calm and listen carefully
- note the caller's name and contact details
- confirm your identity if required
- ask for the complaint to be provided in writing.

Do not provide a detailed response at this stage. When your claim has been accepted, Avant will help you prepare a considered response.

3. Look after yourself

It can be difficult to think clearly when you're distressed. If you need to, take a short break from clinical duties – go for a walk or call someone you trust. If you're too unsettled to focus safely on patient care, it is reasonable to reschedule the rest of your day.

Looking after yourself isn't optional – it's part of managing the situation effectively.

What to avoid

In the initial stages, avoiding missteps is just as important as taking the right actions:

- don't ignore the notification – deadlines are strict and missing them can complicate your situation significantly
- don't respond while upset or under pressure – a reactive response can cause more harm than good. Avant can help you to prepare a considered, well-structured reply
- don't contact the patient or complainant directly – if the complainant contacts you, calmly let them know you've been advised not to discuss the matter
- don't access hospital or third-party records without first seeking advice from Avant
- don't post anything about the complaint on social media
- don't try to manage the situation alone – Avant's team is here for this reason.

What happens next

Once you contact Avant and your matter is reviewed and accepted, we will guide you through each step. This typically involves you providing:

- all correspondence received from the regulator
- a draft response in your own words, drawing on relevant clinical records
- medical records you hold relating to the patient (including pathology, radiology, specialist reports, referrals, care plans, and any relevant communications)
- your current CV.

Avant will:

- help you refine and finalise your response
- consult with the regulator on your behalf and request extensions if needed
- provide advice if the patient wishes to continue seeing you
- guide you through each stage of the process.

The regulator will:

- review the complaint and all responses before making a determination
- keep you informed of the process and outcomes.

How long will it take?

Timeframes vary depending on the complexity of the complaint. Some matters are resolved quickly while others take longer. Avant will provide a clearer timeframe once we've reviewed your situation.

avant.org.au | 1800 128 268



Support is available

You don't need to go through this alone.

Support is available from:

- Avant's medico-legal advisory team – 1800 128 268 – your first point of contact
- Avant's key support services – emotional and practical support beyond the legal process
- your GP – your own health matters, and a trusted GP is an important support
- doctors' health advisory groups (e.g. DRS4DRS) – peer support from people who understand what you're going through
- trusted colleagues, friends and family.

More information

For a more detailed overview of the regulatory process, see Avant's **Dealing with a Regulatory Complaint** factsheet, and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency's information on notifications at ahpra.gov.au.

You can contact Avant at any time on 1800 128 268 or visit avant.org.au.



 **Avant**
By doctors for doctors