

## Cosmetic surgery reforms will help protect patients

As part of broader reforms to Australia's cosmetic surgery industry agreed by Health Ministers in September 2022\*, a new set of standards has been released to focus specifically on improving the safety and quality of care for cosmetic surgery patients.

The new *National Safety and Quality Cosmetic Surgery Standards* ([Cosmetic Surgery Standards](#)) apply to cosmetic surgery involving cutting beneath the skin.

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care developed the standards for implementation in every service where cosmetic surgery is performed, including small day procedure clinics through to large health organisations.

The Cosmetic Surgery Standards complement other cosmetic surgery reforms implemented by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the Medical Board of Australia. They were developed following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Australian Government, state and territory partners, cosmetic surgery services, consumers, peak bodies and interest groups.

### Q+A

#### How is 'cosmetic surgery' defined in the new standards?

'Cosmetic surgery' is defined as an invasive surgical procedure that involves cutting beneath the skin for the purpose of achieving what a person perceives to be a more desirable appearance. Procedures may include breast augmentation, rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, surgical facelifts, abdominoplasty, cosmetic genital surgery, liposuction and fat transfer. Cosmetic surgery is not used to prevent, diagnose or treat medical diseases or conditions.

#### What cosmetic procedures are not covered in the standards?

The standards do not include non-surgical cosmetic procedures such as cosmetic injectables, thread lifts and cryolipolysis (fat freezing), mole removal, reconstructive surgery, gender affirmation surgery, or surgery that has a medical justification, even if it leads to improvements in appearance.

#### Why aren't non-surgical cosmetic procedures included in these standards?

Non-surgical cosmetic procedures, such as fillers, Botox and lasers, differ from cosmetic surgery and are not included in these standards. These procedures are increasingly popular among Australians and warrant a separate comprehensive review and consideration of the impact of long-term use.

#### Why don't we already have standards to protect cosmetic surgery patients?

The Australian cosmetic surgery sector has grown exponentially in recent years to become a distinctive industry operating alongside the existing healthcare system. Unlike other areas of medical practice, this sector has operated without rigorous oversight. This is the first time that standards specifically describe clinical care for a service where cosmetic surgery is performed in Australia. While some facilities performing cosmetic surgery are accredited to the *National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards*, this varies between types of service providers in each state and territory. The new Cosmetic Surgery Standards are aligned to the [NSQHS Standards](#) (second edition), which are implemented in all

\* Media Release - [Crackdown on 'cosmetic cowboys'](#), The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care, 6 September 2023

Australian hospitals and day procedure services.

### Why isn't cosmetic surgery part of the broader healthcare system?

The cosmetic industry is not typically part of the healthcare system as it doesn't provide care to people who are sick or injured but rather provides elective clinical procedures. As a result, consumers, including younger people and adolescents, have been able to undergo sometimes extensive and potentially risky cosmetic surgery procedures independently in non-accredited facilities.

### Which services must implement the Cosmetic Surgery Standards?

All facilities where cosmetic surgery is performed will need to implement these standards. These services may vary in size and the range of services they offer, from single owner-operator day-only services to complex organisations comprising many clinicians.

### How will the new standards protect cosmetic surgery patients?

The standards set out clear, best practice guidance for facilities performing cosmetic surgery procedures. They require robust governance, training and reporting, where none or very little previously existed.

## KEY ISSUES

The Cosmetic Surgery Standards seek to address the following key areas of concern about the sector.

FOCUS AREA	DESCRIPTION
1. <b>Assessment of patient suitability</b>	A patient's suitability for cosmetic surgery must be assessed, with reference to their general health, including their psychological health. A disproportionate number of people who seek out cosmetic procedures are also burdened by mental health challenges, such as body dysmorphic disorder.
2. <b>Advertising</b>	Cosmetic surgery advertising must comply with legislation, national codes and guidelines to prevent poor-quality ads that may deceive or manipulate consumers.
3. <b>Informed consent</b>	Clinicians must inform patients about expected outcomes, potential risks, possible complications, and the likely costs of addressing complications.
4. <b>Complaints</b>	Services must seek feedback from patients about their experiences and outcomes of care and support them in making complaints through the relevant authority.
5. <b>Clinician qualifications</b>	Services must have credentialing processes to verify the qualifications and experience of all practitioners performing cosmetic surgery.
6. <b>Post-operative and continuity of care</b>	Services must provide post-operative care instructions to patients, including if emergency care is required. Services must ensure continuity of medication management and arrangements for evaluation before surgery, as well as post-surgery review.

## COSMETIC SURGERY REFORMS

The Cosmetic Surgery Standards complement [other reforms](#) for the sector in Australia. Collectively, these changes aim to ensure that people undergoing cosmetic surgery can receive care that is safe, and they can make choices having been more fully informed.

The reforms include:

- [Cosmetic Surgery Standards](#), with accreditation to the standards mandatory for services practising cosmetic surgery in Australia.
- National Licensing Framework for Cosmetic Surgery, which describes the recommended regulatory powers that states and territories should implement in their own regulatory settings (for implementation within 2-4 years).

### Ahpra

- [Cosmetic Surgery Enforcement Unit](#) was established in September 2022, with experienced investigators to manage all cosmetic surgery complaints. This includes:
  - [Cosmetic Surgery Hub](#) – a consumer information website to support anyone considering cosmetic surgery in making an informed decision about the procedure.
  - Ahpra Cosmetic Surgery Hotline – where patients can report their bad experiences or concerns to a specialised team at Ahpra.

### Medical Board of Australia

- [Guidelines for registered medical practitioners](#) who perform cosmetic surgery and procedures. Effective 1 July 2023, these guidelines apply to all medical practitioners registered under the National Law who perform cosmetic surgery and non-surgical cosmetic procedures.
- [Guidelines for registered medical practitioners who advertise](#) cosmetic surgery. Effective 1 July 2023, these guidelines aim to address the specific risks involved with cosmetic surgery advertising.

### Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia

- [Position statement on nurses](#) and cosmetic medical procedures. The main focus of this position statement is minor (non-surgical) cosmetic medical procedures.

## 4 STEPS BEFORE SURGERY

- 1. Have an assessment**  
Undergo an independent physical and psychological health check before you commit to cosmetic surgery.
- 2. Make an informed decision**  
Understand your risks and potential complications from cosmetic surgery.  
Be aware of misleading advertising and social media.
- 3. Choose your practitioner**  
Ensure your medical practitioner has the appropriate qualifications and training for the procedure. Check the service is implementing the Cosmetic Surgery Standards.
- 4. Discuss post-op care**  
Know what you will need to do after the surgery, and where to go if you experience complications.

To learn more, visit: [safetyandquality.gov.au/cosmetic-surgery](https://safetyandquality.gov.au/cosmetic-surgery)

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