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**NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS A STEP CLOSER**

A national system of professional standards for all professions has moved closer to reality. However, the intention to encourage all professions into a unified system is in danger of failing through new application guidelines and rushed industry consultation.

During 2004 and 2005 the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments passed similar legislation to establish a system of professional regulation. The system is designed to develop the self-regulation of the professions and improve professional standards. The Professional Standards Council released new application guidelines for the national system in late December. The new guidelines set down what the professions will need to do to have their professions scheme considered for approved by the PSC.

Principal Consultant with Emergence Consulting, John Rappell said today, "The release of the new guidelines by the professional standards council was welcomed, although the timing will not allow effective feedback to the Council. Professional bodies are concerned that they may not be able to meet the new application guidelines, particularly regarding historical claim data over ten years, the costs of legal warranties for each of the eight jurisdictions, and eight separate application fees."

The Council will require professions to create new systems for regulating their professions, including providing the council with substantial documentation before a scheme will be approved and each year under a new reporting standard. The new guidelines have a higher initial threshold for applicants than was anticipated which may lead to professional bodies reconsidering their planned applications. Under the new guidelines it could also take more than a year for a professional scheme to be approved once an application is lodged. The first approvals will not be in place until 2007.

"The professions have an important opportunity to assist the council to understand the practicability and cost of meeting the new national requirements", Mr Rappell said. Submissions to the council on the guidelines are due by 31 January 2006. "The Council needs to move quickly to finalise application guidelines but the consultation period should be extended until at least 28 February to allow the professions to assess the costs and practicability of the new guidelines."

Getting the application guidelines right from the outset is good for certainty and will increase buy-in for uniform national professional standards which is good for professionals and their clients.

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Emergence Consulting Pty Ltd are based in Sydney and specialise in PSC applications, scheme management and reporting, and scheme renewals including policies & procedures, professional standards & ethics, not-for-profit management & governance.

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