

## Cosmetic surgery crackdown now targeting fillers, botox and other procedures

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After a year-long crackdown on the cosmetic surgery sector, medical regulators are now setting their sights on non-invasive procedures. (Supplied: Adobe Stock/hedgehog94)

Australia's medical regulator says it is cracking down on cosmetic procedures such as botox and fillers, but those living with the long-term impacts of botched procedures say the focus has come too late.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the Medical Board of Australia say they will focus on stronger safeguards to protect people from botched procedures by reviewing the level of care patients receive before and after treatment, as well as ensuring there is informed consent before undergoing treatment.

They will propose new procedural and advertising guidelines after receiving a number of complaints which have included significant burns, adverse reactions and serious infections.

"The cosmetics sector is a booming sector, and we want to make sure that anyone choosing to undergo

### Key points:

- Non-surgical cosmetic procedures have grown in popularity in recent years
- Last year, a review led to recommendations for tighter cosmetic surgery regulations
- Now, Australia's medical regulator and medical board have announced they are widening their crackdown to focus on all non-surgical cosmetic procedures

a cosmetic procedure is as safe as possible," AHPRA's chief executive Martin Fletcher told the ABC.

## 'I need to get this stuff out of my face'

Angie, who did not want her real name published, said she was forced to take a year off work as a nurse after getting routine dermal fillers to correct bags under her eyes.

She knew something did not feel right after her treatment at a South Australian cosmetic clinic.

"I went back and said to them, 'This isn't right, I need to get this stuff out of my face.' I was beside myself and couldn't function," she said.

However, complaints about tightness around her face were dismissed by the clinic and she was told to wait for things to "settle down".

### When cosmetic procedures go wrong: Four case studies

- **Yasmin** is a patient with a history of mental illness who disclosed her history of body image issues and expressed dissatisfaction with the results of 10 previous non-surgical cosmetic procedures. **Despite this history, a doctor administered a series of filler injections**
- **Jennifer** was treated with dermal fillers by a registered nurse despite having several known skin conditions that made the treatments inappropriate and dangerous. Following treatment, **Jennifer had an adverse reaction that required the fillers to be dissolved and steroid treatment to be used to address the reaction**
- **Amy** underwent intense pulsed-light treatment with a doctor to improve the appearance of skin on her neck, but instead **suffered significant burns including large purple blistering**
- **Carly** suffered an infection in her cheek following a botched cosmetic thread lift procedure. **Carly's face became so infected she needed surgery to firstly remove an abscess, and then further surgery to restore her appearance**

*Source: AHPRA. All names are pseudonyms*

Angie ended up back in the clinic for hyaluronidase injections around her eyes to dissolve the fillers.

The treatment to fix the problem was intolerable, she said, and led to "excruciating nerve pain".

She also said the shame of what happened to her prevented her from reporting the clinic at the time, and she eventually went to see specialists who gave her steroids, anti-seizure drugs for nerve pain and analgesics.

She said at the very least, there should be better information about what can go wrong with non-surgical procedures, as well as how painful the dissolving agent was to fix the problem.

"They made it look like you're just going there to get your hair done," she said.

"It's an ethical and moral issue for people in the field. They need more consent and understanding of the horrific consequences that could happen.

"My self-esteem wasn't OK at that point in time anyway, but then to have this happen, not knowing if the pain will go away, if I'd be able to work and look after my kids again was very stressful. Getting through each day was a trial."

Do you know more about this story? Email [Specialist.Team@abc.net.au](mailto:Specialist.Team@abc.net.au).

## Doctors banned amid crackdown

AHPRA and the medical board commissioned an independent review of the regulations around cosmetic surgeons back in November 2021, following a joint ABC-Nine investigation of the sector.

[Read the story: Videos show 'dangerous' practices in cosmetic surgery clinics, plastic surgeons say.](#)

Since then, 14 doctors have been banned or restricted from performing cosmetic surgery in Australia.

A cosmetic surgery hotline set up by AHPRA and the medical board has received 428 calls since its launch this time last year.

It also received close to 180 formal complaints, which led to investigations into dozens of doctors.

Michael Fraser, co-director of patient advocacy group Operation Redress, said people had told him they were being upsold a range of procedures while going in for a botox session.

"These doctors will often be more than happy to take your money and sell you procedures," he said.

"If you want to get procedures, get procedures, but you must be able to do so in a safe way. And you mustn't have a doctor trying to upsell you or convince you that you have a problem that you didn't know existed."

He said anyone who was thinking of getting non-surgical procedures needed to do their research and think about their decision carefully.

"My message would be that you wait three to six months if you're considering getting surgery ... and see how you feel then," he said.

"And if you're getting an injectable treatment to ensure that you're going to a place that actually has a fully trained doctor in the clinic. But even then, that really doesn't guarantee you any kind of safety whatsoever."

## **Proposed changes to better protect at-risk Australians, AHPRA says**

Mr Fletcher said at-risk Australians suffering from body dysmorphia and other mental health issues needed to be protected.

"It's really important that those [cosmetic procedure] practitioners do good assessments, they don't target at-risk people," Mr Fletcher said.



He said social media advertising would also be a focus.

"We see a lot of advertising that raises concerns for us," Mr Fletcher said, pointing the finger at social media ads that explain the benefits of cosmetic procedures but not the risks, overstate the benefits, or feature misleading before and after photos.

"We want to really make sure that advertising is accurately and fairly explaining these practices, both in terms of the benefits and risks."

Moving forward, Angie wants all potential clients to get counselling before they can book in a treatment like hers.

"I didn't tell people for so long," she said.

"I was so embarrassed, I didn't tell my friends. It's only now that I realise it's happening to other people. They made it out to feel like I was nuts.

"It's their responsibility to let them know this could happen. You can be so wiped out, so unwell, that they won't be able to take them to court."



Angie won't be getting any more cosmetic procedures in the future. She said they were not worth it.

"If I didn't have kids I needed to protect, I'd be advocating and putting my face out there," she said.

"It breaks my heart that people are going and having these unnecessary treatments."