

Health Legal Report – January 2020

Welcome to the January 2020 edition of the Health Legal Report.

In this issue of the Health Legal Report we discuss:

- The new corporate sector whistleblower protection regime
- New workplace manslaughter offences in Victoria
- Latest mandatory notifiable data breach scheme statistics
- Case note: *Health Care Complaints Commission v Goyer* [2019] NSWCATOD 121 (concerning professional misconduct of a medical practitioner)

We also set out some of the Bills we are tracking throughout Australia, as well as some useful information links.



New corporate sector whistleblower protection regime

By Astrid Keir-Stanley, Compliance Associate

Introduction

On 1 July 2019, the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Enhancing Whistleblower Protections) Act 2019 No. 10* (Cth) (the **Amending Act**) consolidated and strengthened corporate and financial sector whistleblower schemes that were until then contained under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) (**Corporations Act**), the *Banking Act 1959* (Cth), the *Insurance Act 1973* (Cth) and the *Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993* (Cth). The scheme is now centralised and exists under the Corporations Act.

Under this scheme, protected disclosures can be made in relation to **regulated entities** such as companies, trading and financial corporations within the meaning of section 51(xx) of the Constitution, banks, insurers and superannuation entities. Disclosure will only be protected if made by an *eligible whistleblower* (this includes officers, employees and contractors of the organisation).

Amongst the amendments, a new section 1317AI was introduced to the Corporations Act which required public companies (incorporated under the Corporations Act) to have to have a whistleblower policy in place by 1 January 2020, and large proprietary companies to have to have a whistleblower policy in place within 6 months of the end of the financial year in which they meet the threshold for the large proprietary company classification. (This was 1 January 2020 if the company had already met this threshold for any previous financial year). Importantly, however, the requirement to have whistleblower policies in place, is restricted to public companies and large proprietary companies incorporated under the Corporations Act (see summary below).

The Amending Act also amended the *Taxation Administration Act 1953* (Cth) to create a new whistleblower protection regime for disclosures of information by individuals regarding breaches of tax law or misconduct relating to an organisation's tax affairs, (which may include non-compliance with Commonwealth taxation laws or tax avoidance behavior). These amendments are relevant to all tax paying organisations.



In this article, we focus on the Corporations Act whistleblower regime.

Improving protection for whistleblowers in the corporate and financial sectors

The Amending Act expands the types of *disclosable matter* that may be protected by the Corporations Act to also include disclosures of conduct which constitute misconduct or an improper state of affairs or circumstances in relation to a regulated entity or related body corporate. In addition to disclosures to ASIC, APRA and prescribed Commonwealth authorities, disclosures will be protected if made to officers and senior managers of the regulated entity itself, assuming it is also *disclosable matter* under section 1317AA, as discussed below.

Disclosures to a regulated entity are only protected if the information disclosed relates to *disclosable matter* under section 1317AA(4) and (5) of the Corporations Act (in that it relates to misconduct or breach of law as described under those provisions and is not a personal work-related grievance, other than victimisation under section 1317AC as described below).

Information disclosed concerns a **personal work-related grievance** of the discloser if:

- the information concerns a grievance about any matter in relation to the discloser's employment, or former employment, having (or tending to have) implications for the discloser personally; and
- the information:

January 2020 Edition

- does not have significant implications for the regulated entity to which it relates, or another regulated entity, that do not relate to the discloser; and
- does not concern conduct, or alleged conduct, that is an offence against applicable financial, insurance or corporations legislation, an offence against a Commonwealth law that is punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more, or other conduct that represents a danger to the public or the financial system.

Organisations should be aware that under new section 1317AAE of the Corporations Act, it is an offence for a person to disclose an eligible whistleblower's identity or information that is likely to lead to the identification of the whistleblower (**confidential information**). The penalty for this offence is 30 penalty units (currently **\$6,300**), or 6 months imprisonment, or both.

Under section 1317AC of the Corporations Act, it is also an offence for a person to victimise a whistleblower or another person by engaging in conduct that causes detriment, where the conduct is based on a belief or suspicion a person has made, may have made, proposes to make or could make a disclosure that qualifies for protection. It is also important to note that the offence of victimisation also covers *threats* to cause detriment to the whistleblower, or a person who assists the whistleblower. **Detriment** is defined broadly to include:

- dismissal of an employee;
- injury of an employee in his or her employment;
- alteration of an employee's position or duties to his or her disadvantage;
- discrimination between an employee and other employees of the same employer;
- harassment or intimidation of a person;
- harm or injury to a person, including psychological harm;
- damage to a person's property;
- damage to a person's reputation;
- damage to a person's business or financial position; and
- any other damage to a person.

For breach of this section, the penalty is 120 penalty units (currently **\$25,200**) or imprisonment for 2 years, or both.

Further to this, new section 1317AAD will include protections for public interest and emergency disclosures. This section permits persons to disclose certain information to Parliamentarians or journalists where the disclosure would be in the public interest or the information concerns a substantial and imminent danger to the health or safety of one or more persons or the natural environment. A key limitation for these disclosures are that they must have first been made under another provision of the Corporations Act (i.e. to ASIC, APRA, a prescribed Commonwealth authority or the regulated entity in relation to which the disclosure relates) and, in the case of a *public interest disclosure* a period of 90 days must have passed before the initial disclosure was made. For the further conditions that apply before a disclosure of either type can be made, please see section 1317AAD of the Act.

Whistleblower policies (applicable to public companies and large proprietary companies incorporated under the Corporations Act)

To facilitate the operation of the new disclosure scheme under the Corporations Act, new section 1317AI requires public companies and organisations that have been a large proprietary company under the Corporations Act for any year to have in place a whistleblower policy which covers the requirements of that section including, for example, information about how a company will support whistleblowers and protect them from detriment. The penalty for failure to comply with that section is 60 penalty units (currently **\$12,600**), which is enforceable by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (**ASIC**).

Public companies were required have a whistleblower policy in place by 1 January 2020 and large proprietary companies must have one in place within 6 months of the end of the financial year in which they meet the threshold for the large proprietary company classification. This was 1 January 2020 for proprietary companies that had already met this threshold for any previous financial year.

January 2020 Edition

An organisation is a **large proprietary company** for a financial year if their consolidated revenue for the year is \$50 million or more, their consolidated gross assets are \$25 million or more at the end of the relevant financial year, or they have 100 or more employees at the end of the year. In determining this, organisations should take into account the revenue, assets and employees of the entities controlled by the company.

ASIC has released its regulatory guidance (*Regulatory Guide 270 Whistleblower policies*) to help entities establish a whistleblower policy that complies with the legal obligations.

Certain organisations exempted from having a whistleblower policy

It is important to note that ASIC has also provided specific exemptions to some entities from having to have a whistleblower policy (as required by section 1317A of the Corporations Act).

More specifically, section 5 of the *ASIC Corporations (Whistleblower Policies) Instrument 2019/1146* (the **Instrument**) provides that an **eligible public company**, being a public company that is a company limited by guarantee and operated on a not-for-profit basis, and is not a trustee (within the meaning of the *Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993* (Cth)) of a registrable superannuation entity, is not required to have a whistleblower policy in place for as long as the consolidated revenue of the company for each financial year of the company **is less than \$1 million**.

Consolidated revenue in relation to a company means the consolidated revenue of the company, calculated in accordance with accounting standards in force at the relevant time (even if the standard does not otherwise apply to the financial year of some or all of the companies concerned). Furthermore, section 5 of the Instrument states that an eligible public company that was covered by this exemption but has ceased to be covered by the exemption because the consolidated revenue of the company for a subsequent financial year is \$1 million or more, does not have to have a whistleblower policy in place until 6 months after the end of the subsequent financial year.

In addition, under section 6 of the Instrument, an eligible public company whose first financial year ends on or after 1 January 2020 is not required to have a whistleblower policy in place until 6 months after the end of its first financial year.

Conclusion

Organisations should be aware of the types of disclosures and persons that are protected under the Corporations Act and implement controls to ensure that the organisation does not commit an offence against the Act by breaching confidentiality or victimisation provisions. For public companies and large proprietary companies, whistleblower policies should be produced and made available to ensure compliance with section 1317AI of the Corporations Act.

If you have any questions arising out of this article, please contact [Astrid Keir-Stanley](mailto:astrid.keir-stanley@lawcompliance.com.au) on (03) 9865 1311, or email astrid.keir-stanley@lawcompliance.com.au.

New Workplace Manslaughter Offences in Victoria

By Caitlin Prior, Compliance Solicitor

Introduction

The *Workplace Safety Legislation Amendment (Workplace Manslaughter and Other Matters) Bill 2019* (Vic) (the **Bill**) passed its Third Reading on 26 November 2019 and received Royal Assent on 3 December 2019. The Bill is due to commence on a day yet to be proclaimed.

Overview

The Bill amends the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic) (the **OH&S Act**) by inserting Part 5A to provide for the new offence of workplace manslaughter. The Bill acts to create a system of accountability for organisations and their officers, to prevent workplace deaths and breaches of duty owed under the OH&S Act, and to reflect the severity of conduct that places life at risk in the workplace.

Workplace Manslaughter

Part 5A of the Bill introduces two workplace manslaughter offences into the OH&S Act. The first offence prohibits a person from engaging in negligent conduct that constitutes a breach of an applicable duty owed by the person to another person and causes the death of that other person. The second offence prohibits an officer of an applicable entity from engaging in negligent conduct that constitutes a breach of an applicable duty owed by the entity to another person and causes the death of that other person. The offences are intended to capture both conduct that occurs outside Victoria but results in a workplace fatality in Victoria, and conduct that occurs inside Victoria but results in a workplace fatality outside Victoria.

For the purposes of these offences, an “applicable entity” includes a body corporate, an unincorporated body or association, and a partnership. “Officer” has the same meaning as in the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth), and includes directors, people who participate in making decisions that affect a substantial part of the organisations business, and people who have the capacity to significantly impact the organisations financial standing.

An “applicable duty” is a duty imposed under Part 3 of the OH&S Act. Duties owed by employees under sections 25 and 32 of the OH&S Act are not included within the scope of this definition, and the offences do not apply to volunteers. Conduct will be deemed to be negligent for the purposes of the offences if it involves a “great falling short of the standard of care that would have been taken by a reasonable person in the circumstances in which the conduct was engaged in”, and involves a high risk of death, serious injury or illness.

Penalties

To reflect the severity of the workplace manslaughter offences, associated penalties are severe. The first offence carries a penalty of up to 20 years imprisonment for an individual, or a fine of up to 100,000 penalty units (currently **\$16,522,000**) for a body corporate. The second offence attracts a penalty of up to 20 years imprisonment. Additionally, the Bill has amended section 144 of the OH&S Act to provide for an increased maximum fine for workplace manslaughter of 10,000 penalty units (currently **\$1,652,200**) for an individual. Previously under this section of the OH&S Act, if a body corporate contravened a provision of the OH&S Act and the contravention was due to a failure of an officer of the body corporate to take reasonable care, the officer would be liable to a fine not exceeding the maximum fine that could be imposed if a natural person was found guilty of the same offence.



If you have any questions arising out of this article, please contact **Caitlin Prior** on **(03) 9865 1377** or email **caitlin.prior@healthlegal.com.au**.

OAIC Notifiable Data Breaches Statistics Report

By Giovanni Marino, Senior Associate

Introduction

On 27 August 2019 the Federal Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (**OAIC**) published its quarterly statistics report about the notifications received under the Notifiable Data Breaches (**NDB**) scheme.

The NDB scheme is contained in the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth). Organisations subject to the NDB scheme include businesses and not-for-profit organisations with an annual turnover of \$3 million or more, private health service providers, tax file number recipients (which includes public health service providers and other public sector bodies, to the extent that there are disclosures of tax file information), Australian Government agencies and credit reporting bodies. These organisations are required to notify the OAIC and affected individuals when a data breach is likely to result in serious harm to individuals whose personal information is involved in the breach (an 'eligible data breach').

The quarterly report related to the period between 1 April 2019 and 30 June 2019.

245 data breaches were notified 1 April 2019 and 30 June 2019, compared to 215 the previous quarter. The causes of the data breaches in the June 2019 quarter were malicious or criminal attack, human error, and system fault.

The key statistical information provided by the report was as follows:

- 245 data breaches were notified to the OAIC and affected individuals.
- 151 notifications (62%) were attributed to malicious or criminal attacks. These included individuals clicking on a phishing email, or other cyber incidents such as malware or ransomware, or use of credentials that had been compromised or stolen by other means to obtain unauthorised access to personal information.
- 84 notifications (34%) were attributed to human error. This included sending personal information to the wrong recipient via email, unauthorised disclosure through the unintended release or

publication of personal information, and the loss of paperwork or a data storage device.

- 10 notification (4%) were attributed to system faults. The majority involved a system fault resulting in the unintended release or publication of personal information. This may include the disclosure of personal information on a website due to a bug in the web code, or a machine fault that results in a document containing personal information being sent to the wrong person.
- 62% of the data breaches involved the personal information of 100 or fewer individuals.
- However, the OAIC noted (with respect to human error data breaches) that certain kinds of data breaches can affect larger numbers of people. For example, in the June 2019 quarter the unintended release or publication of personal information impacted the largest number of people (an average of 9,479 affected individuals per data breach), and the failure to use BCC when sending emails impacted an average of 601 individuals per data breach.
- The top five industry sectors to report breaches were:
 - health service providers: 47 notifications;
 - finance: 42 notifications;
 - legal, accounting and management services: 24 notifications;
 - private education providers: 23 notifications; and
 - retail: 15.



January 2020 Edition

The OAIC has advised that from July 2019 the OAIC will report every six months on notifications received under the NDB scheme, and at the time of publication the report up to 31 December 2019 has not been released.

To read the full report visit:

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/notifiable-data-breaches/notifiable-data-breaches-statistics/>

Staff News



We recently welcomed the return of **Katherine Stevens** to our team. Katherine has more than 15 years' experience in the health sector, with 5 years' experience in executive management. She is a qualified nurse who was admitted to the legal profession in 2009.

Katherine began her legal career at Health Legal in 2006. Since then, she has acted as both General and Legal Counsel, as well as Board Secretary, in public health services in Victoria.

Given the ongoing growth of the firm, Katherine joins us as Head of Stakeholder Engagement. Katherine prides herself on her ability to identify and engage stakeholders whose participation in strategic endeavours will facilitate effective and efficient change. She is passionate about customer service and her clients' experience.

In early February we welcome 2 members of our team who will become practising solicitors later in the year:

- **Courtney Remington** has experience working with a community legal centre and Victorian Legal Aid.
- **Helen Papageorgiou** has previously worked as a paralegal and as an intern with an employment rights centre, and has volunteered at a range of community legal services.



In March we look forward to the return of **Ksandra Palinic** from maternity leave. Ksandra manages some of the client relationship operations of Law Compliance and provides a key contact of support for our clients. Her role also includes implementing marketing activities, reviewing and updating our expanding range of compliance products and conducting legislative compliance audits.

Prior to joining Health Legal, Ksandra worked at a generalist firm focusing largely on family law, conveyancing, as well as wills and estates. She has also simultaneously worked in pharmacy for over 10 years which has contributed to her interest in medico-legal issues.

Precedents/Standard Form Agreements and Policies

Due to client demand, we have developed a range of standard form Agreements and Policies which are commonly used by health, aged care and community service providers. The documents have been prepared in a template form so they can be completed by your staff.

Our range includes a Whistleblower Policy, Provision of Service Agreements, Supply of Goods Agreements, Supply of equipment with associated services Agreements, Secondment Agreements and a short form Terms of Trade.

*For further information about these precedents please contact **Natalie Franks** on (03) 9865 1324 or natalie.franks@healthlegal.com.au.*

Health Care Complaints Commission v Goyer [2019] NSWCATOD 121

By Chris Reily, Solicitor

Introduction

The New South Wales Civil and Administrative Tribunal (the **Tribunal**) recently found medical practitioner Thomas Goyer (**Goyer**) guilty of professional misconduct. Goyer was Medical Director at a business called the Medical Weight Loss Institute (**MWI**) from 2015-2017 that prescribed weight loss drugs to patients online or by telephone.

This case is an important reminder that in an age where the provision of health care is increasingly moving online and patients demand fast and immediate service, medical practitioners must ensure that they do not cut corners and that their practice and conduct is compliant with the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law* (NSW) (the **National Law**) in order to avoid potential suspension or cancellation of their registration.



Facts

MWI provided weight loss services using a 'telemedicine' model, where patients were not seen or examined in person; instead conferring with "Consultants" online or by telephone. The MWI Consultants included nurses, dietitians, and personal trainers who were the first point of contact for new patients.

Patients were next referred for a telephone consultation with a nurse who obtained a medical history and ordered blood tests, before being transferred to Goyer himself for a further telephone consultation where he would prescribe them medicine.

Goyer asserted that MWI patients were sent information booklets (including a consumer information sheet with medication information) and that they received follow up care from the Consultants. However, no evidence of any follow up with patients existed and the information provided was described by one patient as "merely a welcome booklet" giving very little detail about the treatment.

HCCC Complaint

The Health Care Complaints Commission (the **HCCC**) pursued 26 complaints of asserted unsatisfactory professional conduct and one complaint of professional misconduct as defined in the National Law against Goyer.

The complaints related to Goyer's treatment and prescribing for 25 patients seeking to lose weight. Goyer's prescribing included prescriptions for compounded phentermine capsules, diethylpropion capsules, sublingual drops of Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin (**HCG**) as well as injectable HCG.

The particulars of the patient's complaints concerned the failure to conduct a physical examination, the medications prescribed, the methodology employed in prescribing and the failure to review patients.

The HCCC also asserted that Goyer failed to maintain proper clinical records as required by the *Health Practitioner Regulation (NSW) Regulation 2010* (NSW) (now repealed) (the **regulation**).

Goyer admitted he was guilty of unsatisfactory professional misconduct in respect of some of the complaints but did not admit he was guilty of professional misconduct.

Decision

Unsatisfactory professional conduct

Based on the admissions from Goyer and on expert evidence from Professor Gary Wittert, a specialist physician and professor of Medicine at the University of Adelaide; and Dr Graeme Thomson, a general practitioner, the Tribunal determined that Goyer failed to:

- provide appropriate care and treatment because compounded phentermine capsules,

January 2020 Edition

compounded diethylpropion capsules and HCG have no recognised evidence-based therapeutic weight loss purpose in Australia

- provide appropriate care and treatment generally for patients
- consider the likely benefits and/or risks of prescribing the capsules for weight loss
- obtain an adequate medical history
- physically examine and/or assess the patients
- appropriately monitor the patients following treatment
- obtain informed consent
- maintain adequate patient records.

The Tribunal determined that Goyer's methods clearly fell significantly below the standard expected of a practitioner of an equivalent level of training or experience and constituted unsatisfactory professional conduct under section 139B of the National Law.

Professional misconduct

The Tribunal further considered whether the unsatisfactory professional conduct outlined above was sufficiently serious to support a finding of professional misconduct under section 139E of the National Law. Professor Wittert's expert evidence was particularly influential, he stated:

"It seems he (Goyer) took no steps to even read the prescribing information, basic pharmacology, or appropriate use of pharmacotherapy to manage obesity. There is no indication he sought to review any of the literature. It is unclear whether he has any training in the proper evaluation and management of obesity and does not indicate he took any steps to remediate that. Accordingly, it is unclear how he could appropriate(sic) advise patients of the risks and benefits of the treatments being offered and the alternatives available etc."

The Tribunal agreed that Goyer's conduct in prescribing compounded stimulant medication without a physical examination was totally inappropriate. Further, his conduct was found to be "*particularly reprehensible*" in the case of patients who had revealed medical conditions in nurse consultations which contraindicated such prescribing.

The Tribunal also held that Goyer had a completely inadequate understanding of his record keeping requirements under the regulation, stating:

"His note keeping was, in every case, a standard proforma entry...His mere "history confirmed" does not disclose any proper discussion with a patient about the risks and benefits of the medication, or assessment of their previous weight loss attempts."

The Tribunal ultimately concluded that Goyer's conduct was so serious that it could lead to the suspension or cancellation of his registration for professional misconduct.

Defence

The Tribunal were not persuaded by Goyer's reliance on other MWI employees to "*fill the gaps*" in his patient's care. He was not engaged in any oversight of the employees or the advice they provided. Goyer mostly conducted his role as medical director off-site, accessing information from a record-keeping system kept "*in the cloud*" that was considered unreliable.

Conclusion

This case highlights that in some clinical circumstances it is critical to conduct an in-person physical consultation when prescribing compounded medicine to new patients. Medical practitioners must obtain an adequate medical history, informed consent, ensure the medicine is appropriate and follow up and monitor all patients as required by the National Law.

Medical practitioners are personally responsible for ensuring these processes (and all of their obligations under the National Law) are completed.

Finally, it should be noted that the Tribunal based its conclusions on the unchallenged patient statements and the unreliability of Goyer's evidence. While this was an extreme case, it is important to ensure that medical practitioners keep meticulous records that comply with the relevant regulations in order to avoid professional misconduct findings.

If you have any questions arising out of this article, please contact [Chris Reily](mailto:chris.reily@healthlegal.com.au) on (03) 9865 1343 or email chris.reily@healthlegal.com.au.

January 2020 Edition

Staff Profile – Caitlin Prior, Compliance Solicitor



Caitlin joined the Law Compliance team in June 2019.

Caitlin graduated from the University of Tasmania in 2016 with a Bachelor of Laws and Arts (International Relations and Politics). In 2017, she completed the Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice and was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of Tasmania in August 2017.

During her studies, Caitlin completed her practical placement at a generalist medium-tier law firm working in a variety of areas including family law, wills and estates and commercial and residential conveyancing.

Caitlin works in our compliance team and is involved in reviewing, updating and assisting with the expansion of the legislative compliance products produced by the firm. She is also involved in the development of the case law update product, by summarising recent key cases that have considered the legislation impacting on our clients.

Law Compliance Update

Law Compliance is a legislative compliance business of Health Legal.

Whilst initially focussed on health care organisations Law Compliance now provides compliance services to hundreds of organisations across Australia and this number grows each month. Our aim is to make compliance easy.

Our clients range from small rural community service organisations to government related entities to some of Australia's largest health care organisations, airlines, universities, charities, community service organisations, aged care providers and child care organisations.

In the last 6 months we have welcomed a supermarket chain, several more Universities, a TAFE, a zoo, several community service organisations, a State transport body, public health services, private and not for profit health care providers, aged care providers and an aboriginal cooperative to our compliance subscribers

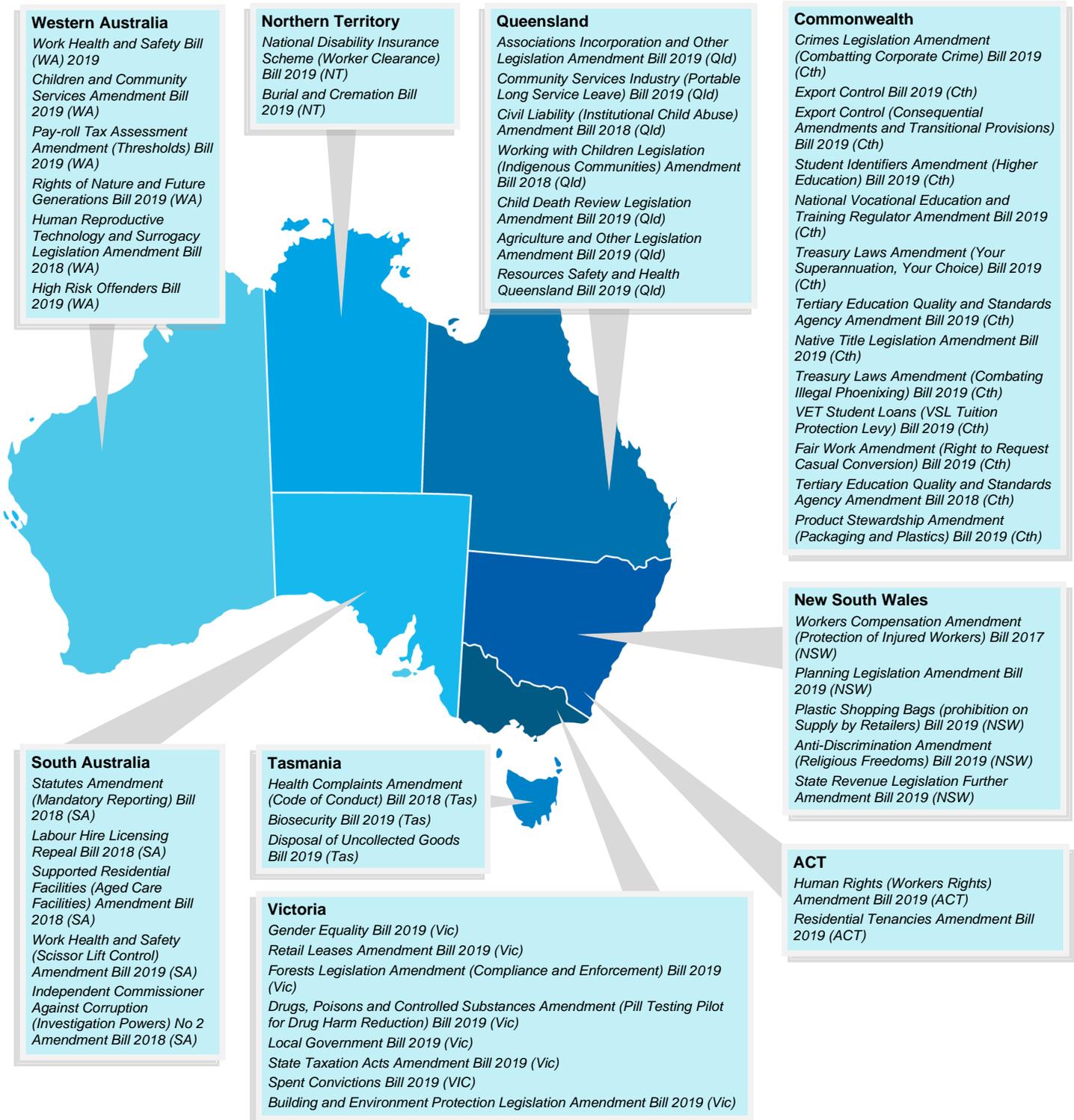
In July 2019 we launched **Comply Online**, our online platform which allows our subscribers to:

- assign topics to individuals within their organisation
- monitor organisation wide compliance activity
- produce a variety of compliance reports, including audit and risk compliance reports



For more information about Comply Online, please contact **Natalie Franks** on (03) 9865 1324 or natalie.franks@lawcompliance.com.au.

Some of the Legislative Changes being tracked



If you would like details of these new Bills please contact **Teresa Racovalis** on **(03) 9865 1337** or teresa.racovalis@lawcompliance.com.au.

January 2020 Edition

Contact us

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