



MEMORANDUM

DATE	June 5, 2024
TO	Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board
FROM	Paul Sanchez, Executive Officer
SUBJECT	Agenda Item #6(a)(i): Board 2021-2024 Strategic Plan Highlights

Background

The Board's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan was created in 2020 and approved in 2021 with a total of 18 Strategic Goals. These Strategic Goals were in the following goal areas:

1. Licensing (four (4) goals);
2. Enforcement (three (3) goals);
3. Outreach and Communications (three (3) goals);
4. Laws and Regulations (three (3) goals); and
5. Program Administration (five (5) goals).

Overall, the Board completed 67% of its Strategic Goals, with an additional 6% of Strategic Goals being in-progress with expected completion by the end of 2024. The breakdown of current completion rates by goal areas is as follows:

1. Licensing (50%);
2. Enforcement (67%);
3. Outreach and Communications (67%);
4. Laws and Regulations (67%); and
5. Program Administration (80%).

Completed Goals

1.1 Provide access to licensing applications and payments on an online platform to improve efficiency.

In February 2023, the Board completed the creation and deployment of all initial applications for licensure, excluding legislatively mandated military-spouse temporary applications that were created and deployed by July 2023.

This goal was accomplished within a single year using the redirection of current staff resources and with the help of a \$400,000 from the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) through the California Department of Technology (CDT) to cover external vendor costs. Funding from the TMF involved a multi-stage process including proposal submission, readiness assessment by the CDT, and a presentation to pitch the proposal to a TMF Selection Committee composed of executives from other state agencies and departments. Board management in partnership with the OIS developed a presentation for the TMF Selection Committee that pitched the Board's proposed online system with application, processing, and payment functionality for thirteen licenses administered by the Board.

Without the significant use of current staff resources and the TMF funding, the Board would not have been able to transition to the new online application system. While this required significant use of current staff to develop, test, train, and deploy, the preliminary findings within a year of the deployment of all initial online applications are positive and initially showing a reduction in processing times of approximately 46% on average.

Board management will provide additional updates on processing time at future meetings as part of the Executive Officer report.

1.2 Complete and submit a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) to request additional licensing positions to meet the demand for licensing services and reduce processing times.

The Board completed and submitted a BCP to obtain additional licensing positions to meet the demand for licensing services and reduce processing times. While the Board was limited in its ability to request additional positions, the Board was approved by the Legislature to receive a clerical specialist position for Licensing in Fiscal Year 2023-24. This position provides clerical support for the licensing process which allows the Board four (4) licensing analysts to focus on reviewing and approving applications for initial licensure. The Board filled this position earlier in the Fiscal Year but is now refilling the position when the individual returned to the private sector in April. The Board will have the new position refilled by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-24.

2.1 Create consumer and licensee resources that detail the enforcement process to increase transparency and engender more trust in the system.

Board management and staff reviewed and revised some of the enforcement and discipline related webpages for clarity and transparency but has not had the resources to develop new consumer focused materials or content for licensees related to the enforcement process. The Board hopes with the additional Enforcement Unit staff member coming onboard that the team will be able to devote time to the creation of such materials as well as completion of review and revision of all enforcement related content on the website.

2.3 Complete and submit a BCP to request additional enforcement positions to reduce enforcement timeframes and increase consumer protection.

The Board completed and submitted a BCP to obtain a junior analyst position for enforcement that will cover CE Audits, Citation and Fine cases, and intake to allow senior analysts and the Board's special investigator to focus their efforts on higher complexity

cases and reduction of investigation times. This position was approved by the Legislature, and the Board obtained the position in Fiscal Year 2023-24. There were some delays in filling the position, but the Board will have the employee hired by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-24.

3.1 Educate stakeholders about why the regulatory process takes so long to set realistic expectations.

Board management and staff developed additional informational and reporting materials on regulatory packages for the Board Meeting materials and the Board's Website. This information is updated periodically as needed.

3.2 Communicate to stakeholders the status of regulations on the website to increase transparency.

Board management and staff developed additional informational and reporting materials on the status of regulation packages and performs ongoing updates to this information on all regulatory packages. Board staff also develop communications to send to various stakeholder email lists regarding regulation notices, changes, and advisories regarding final adoption and implementation activities. Board staff also ensure that information on the Board's website is updated on an ongoing basis for regulatory packages.

4.1 Develop, through the sunset review process, the statutory authority to collect and use stakeholder contact information to enhance the Board's ability to communicate with stakeholders.

Through the 2022 Sunset Review process, the Board obtained statutory authority to require Board licensees to provide the Board with email information in order to enhance the Board's ability to communicate with its licensees. Updated Change of Address forms for licensees include email address and all online applications for licensure require applicants to provide an email address.

4.2 Develop regulations regarding the appropriate level of supervision for trainees, aides, and assistants to safeguard consumer protection and seek statutory changes if necessary.

The Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Supervision package is complete and becomes effective July 1, 2024. Additional changes related to conflict-of-interest issues are currently in the development stages.

The Hearing Aid Trainee Supervision package has been reviewed and language approved by the Board and is currently being prepared for DCA departmental approval by the end of 2024.

The speech-language pathology and audiology aide supervision packages are still under development.

5.1 Utilize technology to develop methods to improve responsiveness to telephone inquiries from stakeholders/consumers to increase responsiveness to stakeholders and improve their access to the information they need.

In 2024, Board management along with DCA OIS have completed a review of the Board's phone tree and call routing system to troubleshoot issues and concerns with call responsiveness. Multiple problems with the phone tree and call routing settings were identified and resolved. These solutions should improve call responsiveness for the Board.

In 2021, Board management reviewed alternative phone system options to improve data and responsiveness. Due to cost concerns, management went with a mid-range cost phone system that originally had minimal data reporting capabilities but whose data reporting capabilities were more than the Board's previous phone system had. In light of recently obtained data reporting capabilities acquired by DCA OIS, additional changes have been made to the phone system settings to improve Board management's ability to review and track phone system data and trends in order to improve responsiveness to stakeholders and improve their access to the information they need. One result of this review has been to start reviewing the volume of phone calls the Board receives on a weekly basis in order to determine the need for additional resources dedicated to responding to stakeholder phone calls.

Board management will continue to work with DCA OIS on system settings and data monitoring to improve responsiveness and request additional staff resources as necessary to meet extremely high call volumes.

5.2 Develop online tools that allow a user to check the status of transactions, including consumer complaints and license applications, to increase responsiveness to stakeholders and improve their access to the information they need.

The new [Application Status & Details](#) online tool for applicants to lookup their application was developed and deployed by DCA OIS and the new online application system sends emails to applicants as they progress through the licensing process, including being able to respond to deficiency notices and upload additional documents as well as copies of completed documents and forms. Due to the scope of the business modernization project, consumer complaints were not included in the project.

5.4 Implement training for staff, Board members, subject matter experts, and expert witnesses to maintain consistent communication and practices.

Board Member and employee orientation training have been updated and deployed. Enforcement and Licensing Units meet regularly to maintain consistent communications and practices as well as do trainings as needed. Subject matter expert (SME) and expert witness training are currently under development with an estimated completion of training materials by the end of 2024 and deployment of these trainings in 2025.

5.5 Move the Board to a new database and online application system to effectively utilize resources and personnel.

The new online application system for initial applications for licensure is complete and has resulted in significant improvements in utilization of Board resources and personnel. Moving to a new database was determined to be financially infeasible with the current technology options available to state entities. When DCA OIS determines new viable options for database replacement in the future, the Board will assess available financial resources at that time.

In-Progress Goals

2.2 Develop an online complaint system to improve interactivity and responsiveness for complainants and licensees.

Due to the limited scope necessary to obtain grant funding for the Board's recent business modernization project related to initial licensing, the Board had to forgo development of an online complaint system at that time. However, the Board has continued reviewing, documenting, and identifying program improvements to be ready to develop an online complaint system and has reviewed and identified technological features similar to those of the Board's new Apply Simply online application system that could be utilized to develop an online complaint system in the future once funding and Board and DCA OIS resources become available.

4.3 Evaluate if there are areas that need to be better defined in laws/regulations regarding oversight and what the scope of practice is in all professions under the Board in order to protect consumers and educate licensees.

This is an ongoing process amongst Board management and policy staff and in consultation with Board Legal and Regulatory Counsel. Current in-progress reviews include conflicts of interest related to supervision of all supervised license types, audiology aide scope and supervision, and dome removal and other hearing health related services. These issues are being explored for future legislative and/or regulatory packages.

Determined Infeasible Under Current Restraints Goals or Incorporated Into Other Board Processes/Goals

1.3 Develop an online system to account for continuing education hours.

Review of current technology systems and features available to the Board revealed that this goal would be infeasible within current technological resources. Reconfiguration of this goal to relate to online submission of CE certificates at the time of renewal may be feasible in the next Strategic Planning cycle, depending on Board and DCA OIS resources to move online renewals to a technology like the one used for the new Apply Simply online application system.

1.4 Create an ad hoc telepractice committee to bring policy issues to the Board.

Board management determined that integration of telepractice issues into all components of the Board's revisions to its Practice Act was a better utilization of Board resources.

3.3 Educate licensees about third party administrators to protect consumers and licensees.

This goal was determined to be infeasible as it is outside of the Board's jurisdiction, jurisdiction resides with the CA Department of Insurance.

5.3 Complete and submit a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) to request additional program administration positions to improve responsiveness to stakeholders and reduce processing timeframes in enforcement and licensing.

Due to State fiscal restraints implemented at various times over the last four years, this goal was determined to be infeasible at the time. The Board will pursue this BCP once fiscal restraints no longer make this infeasible.