

# Is someone using your name online? What every practitioner should know

Reading time:

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Date created: 30/03/2026

Imagine searching your own name online and finding your photo on a website promoting a supplement you've never heard of, or a health service you've never been associated with. Your credentials are listed and your professional headshot is right there, but you never agreed to any of it.

This is something practitioners are encountering more and more, and it can feel like a profound violation of your privacy and the professional reputation you've spent years building.

## A growing problem across the profession

The misuse of doctors' identities in health product marketing is accelerating. As more practitioners build an online presence through practice websites, LinkedIn profiles, medical directories, and conference bios, there's more publicly available material for bad actors to exploit.

In recent years, AHPRA has repeatedly warned the profession about the unauthorised use of practitioners' names and credentials in health advertising, particularly in the supplement and wellness industries. Websites promoting products ranging from weight loss pills to anti-ageing treatments have been found to feature real doctors' photos and qualifications to lend an air of legitimacy, with those practitioners having no idea their identity was being used.

Internationally, the problem has taken on a new dimension with the rise of AI-generated content. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has flagged cases where fabricated or misappropriated doctor endorsements were used in social media advertising for health products. Closer to home, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) continues to receive complaints about promotional material that falsely implies medical endorsement, including the use of real practitioners' details scraped from public websites.

The common thread: your professional credibility is valuable to those selling health products, whether or not you've agreed to lend it.

## What the law says

In Australia, several legal frameworks are relevant when your image or profile is used without consent.

The [Privacy Act 1988 \(Cth\)](#) governs how organisations collect and handle personal information, including images. If a company has sourced your photo or details and used them commercially without a lawful basis, they may be in breach of the Australian Privacy Principles.

[AHPRA's advertising guidelines](#) are also clear: testimonials from registered health practitioners cannot be used in health service advertising. If your name or credentials appear on a product or service website in a way that implies endorsement, the advertiser is likely in breach of these guidelines. That said, it can still damage your reputation and cause you significant distress in the meantime.

Beyond privacy law, the [Australian Consumer Law](#) prohibits misleading and deceptive conduct. If a website is falsely implying you endorse or are associated with a product, there may be grounds for a complaint to the [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission \(ACCC\)](#) or the [TGA](#), depending on the nature of the product.

[Defamation law](#) may also be relevant where the association with a product or service damages your professional reputation.

## What you should do

Some of our members have recently made exactly this kind of unsettling discovery, their photos, names, or professional profiles appearing on websites without their knowledge or consent. We've been helping affected members pursue removal of this material, and we want to make sure you know your rights and how to act quickly.

If you discover your image, name, or professional details being used without your consent, here's a practical first response:

1. **Document everything.** Take screenshots of the material immediately, including the URL, date, and any identifying details about the website operator. Websites can be taken down or changed quickly once a complaint is lodged.
2. **Contact the website operator directly.** A formal written request for removal, citing your lack of consent and relevant legal obligations, is often the fastest path to resolution. Keep records of all correspondence.
3. **Report it to the relevant authority.** Depending on the nature of the site, complaints can be directed to the TGA (for therapeutic goods advertising), the ACCC, or the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) if you believe your privacy rights have been breached.
4. **Contact MIPS.** We can help you understand your options and, where appropriate, support you in having the material removed. Members have found this assistance invaluable when direct approaches haven't resolved the issue quickly.

## A word on prevention

While it isn't possible to completely prevent your information from being misused, it's worth periodically searching your own name online to check how and where your image and profile appear. Review privacy settings on professional platforms, and consider whether the level of detail in publicly accessible bios or directories is necessary.

Your professional identity is an asset you've worked hard to build and you deserve to control how it's used.

If you've encountered unauthorised use of your image or professional details, contact the MIPS member services team for guidance.

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