



Private specialist practice survey results shared with Health Minister

Private specialists feeling they are under growing financial and operational pressure is among the key findings from the AMA (WA)'s recent private specialist practice survey, shared with the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Preventative Health, Hon Meredith Hammat MLA. The findings were shared through a letter co-signed by AMA (WA) President Dr Kyle Hoath and the then Private Specialist Practice Group Chair Dr Brigid Corrigan.

"The survey raises significant concerns about the sustainability of private specialist practice in Western Australia and the implications for patient access, public hospital demand, and overall health system capacity," the letter said.

"The findings indicate many private specialists are under growing financial and operational pressure. In the response data, 80 of 148 respondents (54.1%) rated themselves as concerned about the financial viability of their private practice over the next three to five years. The most cited pressures were increasing overhead costs (111 respondents; 75.0%), declining private health insurer rebates (82; 55.4%) and inadequate Medicare rebates (80; 54.1%).

"When asked what most drives patient out-of-pocket costs, respondents overwhelmingly identified Medicare rebates not keeping pace with real costs (130 respondents; 87.8%), private insurers covering a shrinking portion of total medical expenses (90; 60.8%), and no-gap or known-gap arrangements becoming financially unviable (77; 52.0%).

Dr Hoath and Dr Corrigan said the findings pointed to a broader funding problem, rather than an issue that can credibly be attributed to specialist fees in isolation.

"The workforce implications are also concerning," they went on to say. "Fifty-six of 148 respondents (37.8%) said they were considering reducing their private practice commitments or exiting private practice entirely within the next two years. If intentions are realised, it will reduce private specialist capacity, constrain patient choice, and place additional pressure on an already stretched public hospital system.

"The 2026 Winter Strategy for WA recognises the higher demand placed on health services during this time. Commendably, the 2026 Winter Strategy, amongst other things, provides for collaboration with the private health system to increase public hospital capacity.

"The AMA (WA) encourages the State Government and WA Health to build on this collaborative approach by making greater use of private hospital and private specialist capacity where clinically appropriate. A viable private health system is an important part of the overall health system. It

can help improve patient access, preserve patient choice, free up beds and doctor capacity in public hospitals, and ease pressure on emergency departments and ambulance ramping. This would not only benefit those patients directly, but also help relieve some of the financial and capacity pressures on the public hospital system.

"While Medicare rebates, private health insurer rebates and premium affordability are principally matters for the Commonwealth, the consequences of Federal inaction on these pressing issues will not be confined to the private sector. It will adversely affect the entire Western Australian health system by making private care less accessible, shifting more demand on to public hospitals, and reducing the ability of the private sector to help absorb system pressure."

Dr Hoath and Dr Corrigan requested Minister Hammat's advocacy to the Hon Mark Butler MP, Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, for stronger Commonwealth action for fairer Medicare rebates, appropriate private health insurer contributions and affordable premiums, together with stronger recognition of the private sector's role in maintaining timely access to care and supporting the performance of the public hospital system.

The findings indicate many private specialists are under growing financial and operational pressure. In the response data, 80 of 148 respondents (54.1%) rated themselves as concerned about the financial viability of their private practice over the next three to five years.

"The most consistent message from our members is that the cost of delivering private care has continued to rise, while Medicare and private health insurance rebates have failed to keep pace," the letter said.

"The AMA (WA) opposes egregious or outlier fees, and we support appropriate action to address such conduct, which we do not consider to be common practice in the medical profession. However, it is unreasonable and unwarranted for governments or private health insurers to collectively blame private specialists for patient out-of-pocket costs without acknowledging the sustained erosion of rebates, rising practice costs, increasing insurance and staffing expenses, and the broader economics of delivering safe specialist care." ■