

## Independent report calls for quality metrics that support care, not competition

A new discussion paper has warned that publicly reporting individual specialist quality ratings without robust risk adjustment could create unintended consequences for patients, particularly those with complex health needs, while providing consumers with a potentially misleading picture of care quality.

The report, *Measure to Improve, Not to Rank*, commissioned by medical indemnity insurer Avant and authored by former senior Federal public servant Trevor Sutton PSM, examines proposals to add individual specialist quality measures to the Federal Government's Medical Costs Finder website.

The proposal, flagged in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Health Legislation Amendment (Improving Choice and Transparency for Private Health Consumers) Bill 2026, would see specialist fee information potentially supplemented by quality indicators.

The paper concludes that while measuring quality is critical to improving healthcare, the data currently available is not sufficiently risk adjusted to support fair comparisons between individual specialists in a public setting. Differences in patient complexity, co-morbidities, demographics and multidisciplinary care arrangements mean outcomes often reflect factors beyond the actions of a single clinician.

Mr Sutton's report warns publishing incomplete or poorly contextualised measures could inadvertently discourage the treatment of higher-risk patients, undermine confidence in existing quality improvement programs and reduce the usefulness of information provided to consumers.

"The problem is not measurement itself, it's where and how results are published," Mr Sutton said.

"Metrics such as complication, infection and readmission rates are valuable tools for improving care. However, without sophisticated risk adjustment and appropriate clinical context, there is a real risk that consumers are presented with information that does not accurately reflect the quality of care being delivered.

"The patients most likely to be affected are those with the most complex health needs, because their outcomes are often shaped by factors that extend well beyond the performance of any one clinician."

The paper also draws on new research commissioned by Avant into GP referral behaviour, which found 94 per cent of GPs were satisfied with the quality of specialists available in their area and 95 per cent were confident in the quality of specialists they refer patients to. GPs were markedly more negative than positive about the inclusion of specialist quality ratings on the Medical Costs Finder website, citing concerns about risk adjustment, perverse incentives and the potential for misinterpretation.

The report recommends that Territory, State and Federal health ministers prioritise ongoing funding for Clinical Quality Registries under the National Strategy for Clinical Quality Registries and Virtual Registries 2020–2030. Once a nationally consistent quality framework is in place, the Medical Costs Finder website could display a simple indicator showing whether a specialist participates in a recognised quality improvement program, providing patients with meaningful information without the risks associated with publishing individual performance scores.

Avant Chief Medical Officer Professor Steve Robson said the discussion paper highlighted the importance of distinguishing between quality improvement and public ranking.

“The lesson from overseas is not that public reporting is inherently harmful, but that it is only safe when the data can support it,” Professor Robson said.

The report was presented at Avant’s second Canberra roundtable at Parliament House on Monday, 22 June 2026.

The event’s discussions are informed by a belief that accessibility is about far more than affordability. It is about whether care is available when people need it, whether services remain viable in the communities they serve, and whether patients can confidently navigate an increasingly complex health system confidently.

The full report is available on request.

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As Australia’s largest medical defence organisation and a member owned mutual, Avant represents more than 95,000 members—over half the nation’s medical workforce—across general practice and every specialty. Alongside medical indemnity, we provide services such as private health insurance and practice management support, giving us unique insight into the healthcare system in which doctors work.

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