

New claims data highlights why prescribing expansion needs stronger scrutiny

Australia's largest medical indemnity insurer, Avant, has called on all governments to pause any further expansion of autonomous pharmacist prescribing until a national safety framework is established, after new claims data revealed the significant risks associated with prescribing medicines.

Avant's new *Prescribing and Patient Safety* report found one in five patients involved in prescribing-related claims and regulatory complaints experienced a major injury. Schedule 8 medicines featured in 36 per cent of cases (almost 1,000 claims) with opioids the leading category. Medicines used to treat mental health and neurological conditions such as depression and schizophrenia were the most common Schedule 4 medicines involved.

Avant Chief Executive Officer, Medical Indemnity, Rashi Bansal, said patient safety must come before any further expansion of autonomous pharmacist prescribing.

"The report provides the most detailed analysis yet of where prescribing can go wrong and the consequences for patients," Ms Bansal said.

"One of the most important findings is that safe prescribing does not always mean providing a prescription.

"We've seen many claims arise from decisions to reduce, decline or cease medication, yet in most of these cases practitioners were found to have met the required standard of care. Sometimes safe prescribing means saying no."

"Any prescribing model must support good clinical decision making in both directions, whether the decision is to prescribe or say no. Access cannot come at the expense of safety," Ms Bansal added.

The new report builds on data released by Avant in June showing medication-related incidents were identified in almost one in six medical indemnity claims and complaints, making prescribing one of the highest-risk clinical activities.

The analysis reviewed more than 16,000 claims and regulatory complaints closed between July 2020 and June 2025 and identified more than 2,600 claims and complaints involving medication-related issues.

Avant Chief Medical Officer, Professor Steve Robson, said prescribing is far more than simply selecting a medicine.

"Prescribing requires accurate diagnosis, clinical assessment, an understanding of competing causes of symptoms, and careful consideration of risks, benefits and alternatives. These are skills developed through years of medical education, supervised training and clinical practice," Professor Robson said.

"Patient safety demands a consistent, evidence-based approach that reflects the realities of prescribing risk and puts safeguards ahead of scope expansion."

Ms Bansal welcomed the decision of State, Territory and Federal Health Ministers last month to develop a National Decision-Making Framework but said it must put patient safety ahead of further scope expansion. Avant has proposed eight recommendations to inform its development.

"Our claims and complaints data sourced from decades of experience provides a unique window into where prescribing goes wrong in the real world," Ms Bansal said.

“Schedule 8 medicines and other drugs of dependence require the strongest safeguards and should remain outside autonomous community pharmacy prescribing.

“Where there is a reasonable likelihood that safe use of a medicine depends on assessment and diagnosis by a doctor, that medicine should not be available for autonomous pharmacy prescribing.”

Avant is also calling for all consultations to include documentation and a comprehensive clinical record in line with Ahpra’s shared code of conduct.

Avant’s *Prescribing and patient safety* report, which includes additional insights and recommendations, is available [here](#).

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About Avant

As Australia’s largest medical defence organisation and a member owned mutual, Avant represents more than 100,000 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.

For further information, please visit www.avant.org.au

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