

# Members' Annual Report 2022



# By doctors, for doctors

Avant is a member-owned organisation founded by a group of doctors in 1893. We are Australia's largest medical indemnity insurer, protecting over half of all doctors and committed to a sustainable health system that delivers quality care to the community.

Our purpose is to provide confidence to doctors so they can keep serving the community. Our extended range of products, specifically for doctors, further supports them throughout their lives and careers.

Today, Avant represents over 82,000 health practitioners and medical students, across every state and territory. No one knows better than us, the unique context and challenges doctors face – we are the doctors' company.

## Owned by, and run for, members

Avant is run for its members with any profits reinvested to benefit them and the community.

Doctors are on, and chair, our board to represent members' interests, values and priorities.



## Leading protection and support

Our legacy of steadfastly protecting members' reputations remains at our core.

We are more than an insurer, providing holistic support to help doctors practise at their best, throughout their careers.



## A sustainable future

Our financial strength and stability deliver sustainability for members.

We continually look at ways to offer better value and solutions to assist current and future generations.



## Contents

### Overview

- 1 Chair's message
- 2 Highlights
- 3 Managing Director's report
- 4 Financial summary
- 7 Giving back to members
- 8 A sustainable future

### Products and services

- 11 Medical indemnity
- 14 Practice protection
- 16 Support throughout life
- 18 Doctors' Health Fund
- 21 Avant Law expanded services
- 22 Financial services for doctors
- 24 Technologies improving healthcare operations
- 26 Avant Travel Cover

### Member-owned mutual

- 27 Avant Foundation and other grants
- 30 Advocating for members
- 32 Supporting the profession
- 35 Members informing your mutual
- 36 Avant Mutual Board – elected members
- 37 Experts appointed to the Board
- 38 Executive Leadership Team

# Chair's message

The last year has seen many challenges for Australia's doctors as we negotiate another phase of the pandemic, and face, with all Australians, into global uncertainties. Avant Mutual remains focused on supporting our members. We understand the essential role that a strong medical indemnity insurer plays in providing the peace of mind doctors require as they go about their work and it is for times like these that we have prepared. Our strength of purpose and our prudent management places us in good stead to face challenges in the years ahead.

The continuing impact of the pandemic on members is evident from the use of our medico-legal advice line – which responded to 30,000 calls in this last year, the highest ever number – and the participation in our webinars advising members of the meaning and impact of government policy decisions on them. These direct conversations with our members have allowed us to advocate strongly to government for policy that recognises the real world experience of doctors. We have worked hard to be the considered and trusted voice of our members over many years and this has borne fruit during COVID times.

Beyond the burden of illness, it is evident that a second front has opened up in the pandemic. The stresses caused by the added workload and processes have taken their toll on both doctors and our patients. Many members contact us about managing difficult patients and the frequency of professional conduct claims increased against the previous year. Medicine is a profession where mental health is a far too common issue and these additional stresses, along with reduction in income and disruption in training programs, have meant burnout was cited in our member survey as another challenge for many doctors.

Avant wants to support members on this front as well. To that end, Avant has arranged personal support services, where members can access free and confidential counselling sessions. We are cognisant that doctors are very good at finding their own solutions and so we continue to support the

great member initiatives that seek to address doctors' mental wellbeing, namely Crazysocks4docs Day and Hand-n-Hand.

Our vision over many years has been to be a trusted professional partner who supports doctors throughout their lives and careers. We therefore continue to look for further ways to serve members that leverage our deep understanding of doctors' lives. The Avant technology solutions and insurances to support doctors in their practices have met a need, and we have taken on board the interest expressed by members in services for their personal lives. There has been excellent uptake of our private health insurance product since Doctors' Health Fund was brought into the Avant fold 10 years ago, and this year we expanded our legal firm, Avant Law, to offer additional services along with our award-winning medical indemnity team. The new lawyers' sole focus is to serve the personal, professional and business legal needs of doctors, which has also been well received.

Avant's almost 130-year history gives us a unique perspective on doctors and medical practice. The Board is committed to investing in the skills and careers of today's members so future members inherit a strong profession that can best serve the Australian people. The Avant grant programs continue to support a range of research projects and this year we established a Coaching Collaborative program, which brings together emerging and experienced researchers. The grants also support education and leadership programs with a focus on quality, safety and professionalism in medicine, as we seek to be a leader in this space.

As a member organisation, it is important to us to stay close to the values of our members. We have looked at our operations to ensure our environmental, social and governance activities support long-term sustainability for our organisation and the communities we impact. A work program is underway, and we will continue to identify areas of our businesses where we can take action to make a positive impact.



Avant has worked hard over the last three years to live up to its commitment to members to be 'by your side' and I want to thank all the members of the Avant team who have served our profession so well. We are well placed to face the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Finally, I would like to thank the members who serve on committees and advisory groups and to all our members. We are grateful for your continued support.

*Beverley Rowbotham*

**Dr Beverley Rowbotham**  
Chair, Avant Mutual

# Highlights 2021-22

## Professional



82,000+

members  
(as of 30 June 2022)



98%

of members renewed  
their membership



1,114

practices subscribe  
to PracticeHub



30,000+

calls to our Medico-legal  
Advisory Service

## Personal



64,518

lives covered by  
Doctors' Health Fund



23%

growth in life insurance  
customers



3,107

Avant Travel Cover  
policies issued



\$799m

in loans by  
Kooyong

## Mutual



\$1.32b

in net assets



\$394m

in members' Retirement  
Reward Plan notional  
balances



\$25m

savings in premium  
payments under the  
Loyalty Reward Plan



\$5.8m

in additional disaster  
relief support provided  
to members

# Managing Director's report

Members are at the heart of everything we do. It has been central to how we have served doctors for nearly 130 years and continues to be, so that members can focus on caring for their patients and families.

Doctors have been under more pressure than ever in recent years, and our core purpose of protecting your reputation has never been more front of mind for us. I am pleased to see the feedback from members on how well we are supporting you through the difficult times.

The environment has also been a challenging one for Avant to navigate as COVID has impacted our staff and financial markets, and lockdowns prevented us from being able to meet members in person. The strength of the organisation and close connections to the profession have enabled us to deliver a high level of support over the year.

## Financial strength continues

Our core medical indemnity and private health insurance businesses both saw good growth in member numbers. Although there were more members insured, the main cost driver of claims was lower than the previous year. This was partly achieved through effective cost management for civil compensation claims for medical indemnity, despite the frequency remaining high.

Continued turbulence in the financial markets saw the gains made in 2021 lost in early 2022 as the war in Ukraine and the Omicron wave impacted businesses globally. Our cautious approach to investing members' money and management of the ebbs and flows, insulates members from these swings. This means fluctuations do not flow through to impact premiums, allowing us to keep them stable for members, while continuing to deliver a quality service.

The strong fundamentals of the business have meant we have again been able to return funds to members through the Retirement Reward Plan\*.

Over \$14m in dividends is being paid to retiring members and a further \$28m contributed to the plan which now has \$394m that is allocated across 52,400 eligible members.

## Strong support for members

Our medical indemnity team continues to grow in response to increased demand and member numbers. Being here for members when they need assistance is central to our purpose.

The pandemic has impacted members' ability to both deliver and use healthcare services and we have sought to support members through these times by giving back where possible.

Our commitment not to profiteer from the pandemic over the last two financial years, saw Doctors' Health Fund giving back a further \$5.8m in 2022, on top of deferring premium increases for six months. Overall, we have returned over \$20m to members in pandemic and disaster relief, since the start of 2020. As we now move into a 'living with COVID' world, the focus will remain on providing premium stability.

## Sustainable future

It is 10 years since we started to diversify our services through the acquisition of Doctors' Health Fund. Further diversification has strengthened the organisation and delivered greater value to members as Avant evolves to be a doctors' company.

A great deal of consideration is undertaken when moving into new areas. Unfortunately, changes to financial services regulation meant, in the interest of members, we needed to adapt by withdrawing from offering financial advice and transforming our life insurance offerings.

While we have needed to adjust some offerings, in response to member feedback we are excited to have expanded the legal services offered by Avant Law. It now provides new personal and business legal services to doctors, building on its strong medical indemnity heritage.



In response to increasing costs for doctors and practices, we have taken a 25% equity stake in Team Medical Supplies. This acquisition helps us to use the scale of the Avant membership to procure savings on medical supplies for our membership.

Being member owned, the continued loyalty of members and uptake of our new services has been gratifying to see. This has contributed to us reaching a new high of over 82,000 members in June 2022, as more doctors choose to be part of Avant.

Delivering the support and services to members is not possible without a great team, including the directors, executive team and all our staff, and I thank them for their dedication to our members.

A blue ink handwritten signature that reads "Natasha".

**Natasha Fenech**  
Group CEO and Managing Director,  
Avant Mutual

\*The Retirement Reward Plan reflects the current policy of the Board for determining which members of Avant are eligible to participate in the Retirement Reward Plan and any Retirement Reward Dividends declared by Avant. The Retirement Reward Plan is entirely at the discretion of the Board and no member will be eligible to receive a Retirement Reward Dividend until such time as the Board declares a dividend in favour of that member. The Retirement Reward Plan is subject to change, suspension or termination by the Board at any time. The current eligibility criteria and allocation rules are available at [avant.org.au/arrp](http://avant.org.au/arrp).

# Financial summary

Avant remains in a strong financial position despite the turbulence in investment markets, and continues to be in a strong position to support members now and into the future.

The year saw financial headwinds strengthen for many industries and economies across the globe. However, our prudent financial management principles mean we are able to continue to deliver against our financial objectives.

We previously outlined the goals of Avant's long-term capital management strategy and we remain committed to the following objectives:

- limiting premium increases as much as possible
- keeping members' capital fully invested even during volatile market conditions, thereby focusing on long-term returns
- returning real value to members in the short term through the Loyalty Reward Plan and other pandemic-related member support, and in the long term via the Retirement Reward Plan.

## Sound underlying financial results

The 2021-22 financial year proved challenging to navigate due to several factors, including the ongoing and changing impact of COVID, the war in Ukraine, surging inflation and interest rates and, in the second half of the year, cost of living pressures and a buoyant employment market. Pleasingly, our core operating business units performed in line with expectations, delivering strong results.

However, as foreshadowed last year, the volatility in investment markets continues to be unpredictable and was the main driver of the group's overall result of a net loss of \$48m.

The group remains extremely well capitalised with net assets still in excess of \$1.3b, and a very healthy \$18,800 per member. Members' interests remain our priority as we continue to manage our funds both prudently and effectively.

## Further assistance for members

Floods and the continued impact of the pandemic, affected some members financially and we were pleased to have been able to continue supporting them at a difficult time.

Further, delays in elective surgery have resulted in lower claim volumes throughout the private health industry, and we are proud to have been able to return funds to our Doctors' Health Fund

members. We have delayed premium price increases by six months, saving Doctors' Health Fund members \$2.8m and returned \$3m in the form of a cash give-back, due to the reduced claims volumes.

## Leveraging our growth

We continue to see our membership grow, which now stands at over 82,000. Retention remains exceptionally high at 98%, a reflection of our stable and competitive premiums and the high quality of service we continually strive to deliver.

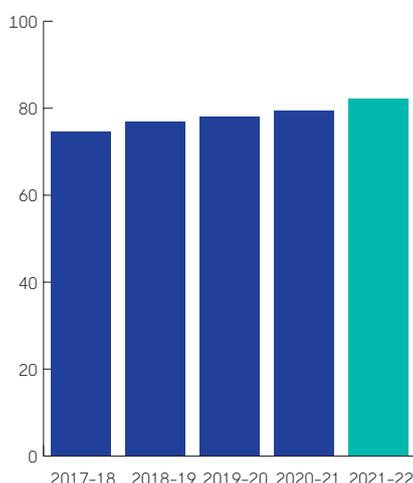
The continued diversification of Avant through new businesses leads to increased scale benefits and allows us to provide more services and products to this growing member base.

## Positive insurance result

Our insurance portfolio of practitioner and practice indemnity plus Doctors' Health Fund, continues to grow. Underlying net earned revenue increased by 9.1% over the previous year, adjusted for financial support provided to members. Overall, premium growth was broadly distributed equally across volumes and price.

Reported claims expense across the portfolio was impacted by many factors, with the rise in interest rates and the resulting benefit from discounting, having a significant

Avant doctor and medical student members ('000s)



Insurance financial results (\$m)	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Net earned revenue (less levies)	329	362	384	409	445
Claims expense	(209)	(268)	(307)	(332)	(295)
Administration expenses	(73)	(79)	(75)	(78)	(85)
Investment income	15	39	33	6	(24)
<b>Insurance surplus</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Key Ratios (excluding levies)</b>					
Claims ratio	63%	74%	80%	81%	66%
Administration expense ratio	22%	22%	19%	19%	19%
Combined ratio	86%	96%	100%	100%	86%

positive impact. Lower claims in private health also contributed to the lower than expected claims result. Overall, underlying claims expenses for the financial year were in line with expectations, with lower claim numbers broadly offset by a marginally higher allowance for future inflation.

The frequency of civil litigation claims, which are the largest proportion of claims expenses, reduced during the second half of the year and may have been impacted by COVID-related disruptions, such as suspensions of elective surgery and lockdowns. However, this was offset by an increase in the average cost of these claims.

The costs associated with other claims were down and contributed to lower than expected claims costs.

We continue to invest in our people and infrastructure resulting in expenses growing from last year. However, pleasingly, expenses as a proportion of revenue have remained steady.

Investment income for the insurance portfolio was negative due to the impact of rising interest rates and general market volatility. This impact is to be expected, but our investment strategy minimised it and contributed to a positive overall insurance surplus when considering the low claims cost.

### An increasingly diversified portfolio

The revenue streams for Avant continued to evolve as our range of products and services designed for doctors grows. Revenue from diversified products now represents 38% of total revenue.

While Doctors' Health Fund represents the majority of this revenue, strong growth continues in other areas with PracticeHub growing another 28% during the year and Financial Services, including lending, growing by 71%.

In addition to these established businesses, the newly extended Avant Law services commenced in July 2022 and are expected to add further avenues for revenue in the future. The partnership with Team Medical, while not consolidated into Avant's revenue, is another development where members benefited from the group's increased footprint.

### Investment markets remain uncertain

The volatility in global and domestic investment markets has been well documented in recent times. The speed and increase in interest rates seen during the first half of the calendar year was unprecedented as central banks globally acted to stem the threat of rising inflation. Avant was well placed to take advantage of this change and ultimately, our members will benefit from higher returns despite the short-term impact on profits.

Our approach to managing Avant's investments is to smooth out the fluctuations both in the market and insurances businesses, to provide stability and security to members. This occurs over a long time with investment returns averaging approximately 4% since the start of the pandemic, during a period where interest rates were almost zero.

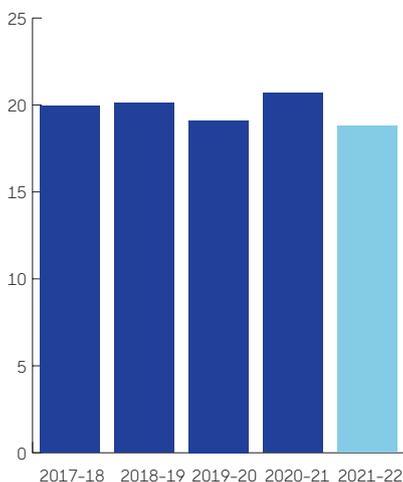
The chart below shows that rolling five-year average returns for all investments over time have been positive and allow Avant to remain strong well into the future.

### Looking forward

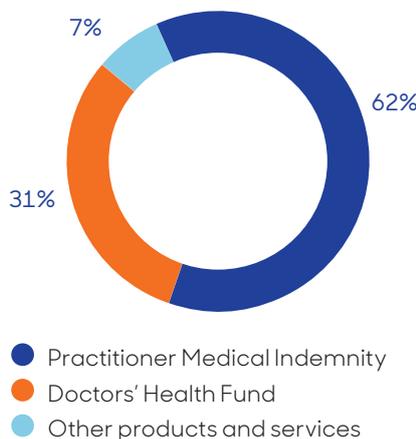
The future will see many challenges including the threat of inflation through claims costs and administrative expenses, uncertainty of hospital capacity and private health claims, and ongoing investment market instability. Avant's long-term approach to managing capital and premium levels, combined with conscious focus on costs and claims management, means we are well equipped to meet these uncertainties.

The scale in our core businesses remains important, but equally important is our ability to add more revenue streams, which will ultimately mean Avant is more resilient to specific financial shocks. In the end, this will allow us to meet the financial objectives outlined.

Net assets per members (\$'000s)



Avant Mutual revenue 2021-22



Rolling five-year average Avant Group investment growth



## Appreciating life in the slow lane

For Dr Neelam Bhardwaj, life now consists of exploring new hobbies and spending time with her family, including six grandchildren all under the age of seven.

"I feel a sense of relief, for the first time I don't have to be anywhere in a hurry," says Dr Bhardwaj of her newfound retiree status.

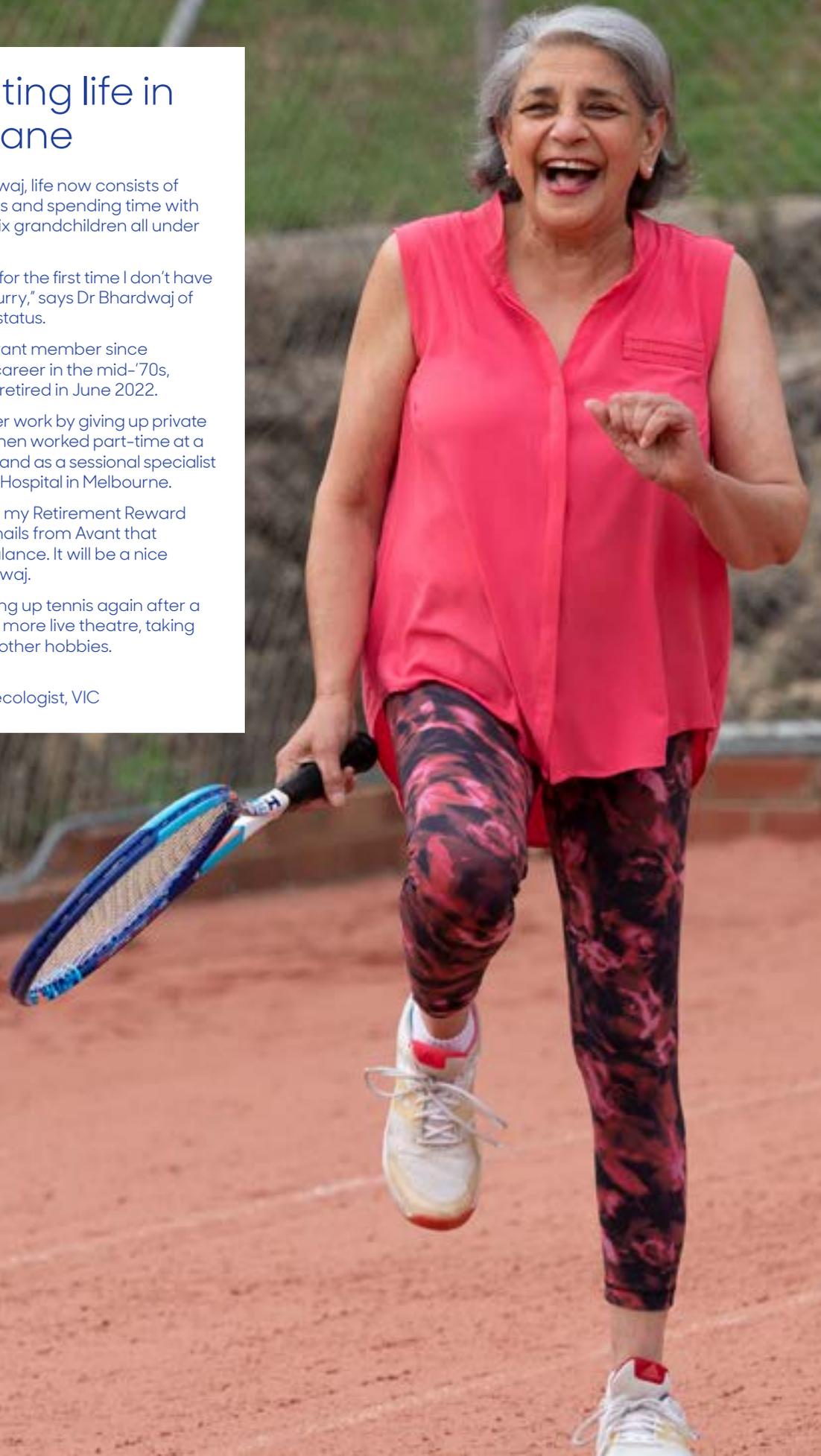
As a long-standing Avant member since the beginning of her career in the mid-'70s, Dr Bhardwaj officially retired in June 2022.

She scaled back on her work by giving up private practice in 2016 and then worked part-time at a women's health clinic and as a sessional specialist at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne.

"I have been aware of my Retirement Reward Plan, thanks to the emails from Avant that updated me of my balance. It will be a nice bonus," says Dr Bhardwaj.

Her plans include taking up tennis again after a long hiatus, attending more live theatre, taking up golf, and pursuing other hobbies.

**Dr Neelam Bhardwaj**  
Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, VIC



# Giving back to members

Being a mutual, when we make profits we share with our members and invest back into the medical profession.

## Returning profits to members

Over the year, a further \$5.8m of assistance was provided to members impacted by the floods and the pandemic in the form of premium discounts, deferred premium increases and financial hardship relief.

Due to surplus profit that resulted from lower claiming during periods of lockdown and restrictions, Doctors' Health Fund announced additional give-back initiatives. The year 2021-22 included a six-month freeze on premiums with premium increases delayed to 1 October 2022. A total of over \$20m has been returned to Avant and Doctors' Health Fund members in surplus premium and other support initiatives, since the start of 2020.

## Supporting the advancement of healthcare

Another way we give back is through our commitment to promote the advancement of medicine. In 2021-22, nine grants and 19 scholarships were awarded by Avant with a total value of \$974,000.

These grants contribute to advancing medicine, improving clinical practice, health policies and includes a bursary awarded to support two Indigenous medical students as a step to improving Aboriginal health.

It is also a priority at Avant to support the profession in its activities to improve healthcare. Separately to our grants and scholarship programs, our partnership arrangements with medical colleges, societies and associations enable advancements in education, research and advocacy activities that improve medical practice. Avant invested a total of \$530,000 in 2021-22 to eligible recipients in our partnership programs.

## Discounts through the Loyalty Reward Plan<sup>^</sup>

Most members will have been with Avant for many years, many since the start of their careers. We value this loyalty and recognise it through the Loyalty Reward Plan (LRP), which is our way of saying thank you to members for their years of loyalty to Avant.

When our financial performance is strong, we share this success with eligible members via a rebate against their practitioner indemnity premium. The plan has delivered savings to members every year since its inception in 2012. The rebate varies and is dependent on a member's length of tenure with Avant.

In 2021-22, over 43,000 members were eligible for a premium rebate under our LRP, saving them a total of \$25.5m in premium payments. We are pleased to announce that members will again be receiving rebates of up to 12% on their practitioner indemnity premium in 2022-23.

## A growing retirement fund

The Retirement Reward Plan (RRP)<sup>\*</sup> is another way we share our financial success with members. Avant is the only Australian-owned medical defence organisation to offer this scheme, which was created to show our appreciation and gratitude to members for their commitment to Avant and the medical profession.

The plan gives us the ability to return surplus capital to eligible members by way of a dividend, when they permanently retire from paid medical practice. Each year, the Avant Board considers making an annual notional contribution to the plan after reviewing the financial strength and outlook of the year. This gives us the ability to recognise your contribution to Avant throughout your years of medical practice.

This year, Avant notionally contributed a further \$28m to the plan, bringing the total to almost \$394m and benefiting over 52,000 members under the plan. Once again, we are pleased to make payments to members who retired during the previous financial year.

A total of \$14.4m is being paid to 821 members. Since its inception in 2014, over \$72m has been paid out to retired members. You can view your notional allocation by logging into your account at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au).

Although payments are not guaranteed, dividends have been paid and additional notional contributions made every year since the plan was established, thanks to the financial stability of Avant.

## Getting Started in Private Practice Program

Avant's priority is always putting members first, which includes helping them start in private practice. The Avant Getting Started in Private Practice (GSIPP) program was created to help ease financial pressures in the first years, by offering substantial savings on practitioner indemnity premiums.

The GSIPP program is a tier system that operates over the course of four years. Members are offered an 80% discount on their first year of premiums, which decreases incrementally each year<sup>†</sup>.



\$14m

Retirement Reward Plan payments

\$25m

in saving from the Loyalty Reward Plan

\$974,000

awarded in grants, scholarships and bursaries

<sup>^</sup>Not all Avant members are eligible for a LRP reward. The provision of any LRP reward is not guaranteed and will be determined by the Avant Insurance Board's annual assessment of the quality of Avant's financial performance.

<sup>\*</sup>The RRP is entirely at the discretion of the Board and no member will be eligible to receive a RRP dividend until such time as the Board declares a dividend in favour of that member. See [avant.org.au/arrp](http://avant.org.au/arrp) for current eligibility criteria and allocation rules.

<sup>†</sup>The GSIPP discounts do not apply to previous or existing members of the GSIPP scheme, only apply from the 1st year a member becomes eligible and are subject to eligibility rules. See [avant.org.au/new-private-practice](http://avant.org.au/new-private-practice)

# Taking actions for a better, more secure and sustainable future

## Avant's sustainability framework

We are focusing on five themes for action across environmental, social and governance matters. These themes are aligned to member values and our commitment to give confidence to doctors in serving the community. Actions for sustainability are deeply embedded in our business practices today, and we are committed to uplift our performance across each of the areas.

### Improving healthcare

We invest to drive improvements in healthcare, focusing on areas identified as most in need. This is achieved through funding of member research and initiatives, advocating for improvements in healthcare, and influencing doctors' training for better health outcomes.



### Health & wellbeing

The wellbeing of doctors is essential for the delivery of healthcare. We strive to change the systems and cultures adversely impacting doctors' health and wellbeing, as well as committing to be a model organisation for employee welfare.



### Diversity, equity & inclusion

Australia's multicultural society is reflected in our membership and the diverse communities our members serve. We aim to be a leading example by transparently building a diverse and inclusive workplace that harnesses people's unique capabilities and perspectives.



### Sustainable consumption

We are committed to minimising our carbon footprint through sustainable consumption and production. Action is being taken to assess and reduce our impact on the planet, and we are committed to seek how to further reduce the environmental impact of our operations.



### Responsible business practices

As a member-owned organisation, we have a responsibility to act in members' best interests. We maintain high standards of governance and regulatory compliance which is overseen by the doctors and business experts on our Board.



# Sustainability highlights

Our members, employees and community are increasingly concerned with environmental, social and ethical issues, and we acknowledge our role in having a positive impact. Being member-owned, we are committed to developing a sustainable future, doing business today in a way that considers generations to come.

**Avant's Early Career Research Program** (formerly the Doctor in Training Research Program) was launched in 2012 to support young doctors' research to promote better patient outcomes. In its first 10 years, the program invested \$3.5m across 128 projects covering topics including transplants, oncology and cardiology.

**A Workplace Diversity Report** is lodged each year to ensure transparency on Avant's situation and demonstrate progress made against stated goals. The report notes gender splits, paid parental leave and support for carers along with other information on Avant's policies and tables on workplace profile tables.

**Our Responsible Investment Policy** governs Avant's response to complex environmental, social and governance issues that arise from investing in companies. As a responsible investor, Avant favours active ownership to improve a company's behaviour and management of these issues, but have taken an exclusionary approach to tobacco investments.

**Our Personal Support Services** offer members and staff a range of support tools, including six sessions of external counselling. The support services have been increasingly used during recent times as the stress of the COVID pandemic, floods and bush fires have impacted many members.

**A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)** has been commenced by Avant. The first stage, known as a Reflect RAP, has been registered with Reconciliation Australia for completion by August 2023. The process involves 12 months of scoping and developing relationships with First Nations stakeholders, to explore our sphere of influence and form our vision.

**COVID vaccines for UNICEF**  
In early 2022 we made a commitment to turn employee COVID boosters into a free COVID vaccine through a unique program with UNICEF called Give the World a Shot. So far Avant has been able to provide over 300 COVID vaccines via the program.





## Trusted and exceptional service

I have dealt with Avant in response to issues of medico-legal risk, and I have always found that Avant looks after me in the same way that I try to look after my colleagues and their patients – prompt, thorough and effective.

True professional performance is judged on how we perform when things get tough. In this respect Avant is exceptional, their approach is indistinguishable from that of my most trusted clinical colleagues.

**Dr Sean Mackay**  
Upper GIT, HPB and Bariatric Surgeon, VIC

# Medical Indemnity



**Dr William Glasson AO**  
Ophthalmologist, QLD  
Avant Mutual Director

Protecting members' professional reputations remains at the heart of the organisation. It's why doctors join Avant and is central to the culture of the organisation.

The peace of mind of having Avant on your side and the ability to reach out for advice when you need it, is something valued by myself and other members. Seeing once again that 98% of members chose to renew with Avant, is testament to the quality and value of protection we provide.

Our medico-legal advisory team is often the first point of contact when a doctor faces a difficult situation or has an incident. Therefore, we have experienced solicitors, claims managers and medical advisers across the country to provide the expertise and support required.

There has been a steady increase in demand for assistance from our advisers over the past few years. In 2021-22, our team responded to more than 30,000 calls, addressing queries from doctors and practice staff. This included responding to 682 calls for urgent support outside business hours. It is pleasing to see the advice and support we provide is the most valued aspect of being an Avant member\*.

### Frequency of claims increased

Medical indemnity claims frequency remains high, despite the disruption to elective surgery during the pandemic. Overall claim numbers were up compared to the previous year - averaging 115 claims per 1,000

members in 2021-22. The increase was driven by a 12% rise in professional conduct claims, which had declined in 2020-21 but increased to a record high frequency this year. Although many complaints matters result in no further action, they put additional stress on doctors in these testing times, which has been evidenced through the increased use of our personal support services.

Civil litigation claims remained steady after recent increases in frequency. These claims can be protracted, particularly if they proceed through the courts, so our legal teams work closely with members to achieve the best possible outcome while protecting the membership against excessive costs.

### Common medico-legal issues

Members also contacted us on many issues, from doctor-patient relationships to Medicare audits. The most common topic members sought our expertise on during the year was clinical treatment issues, which ranked third



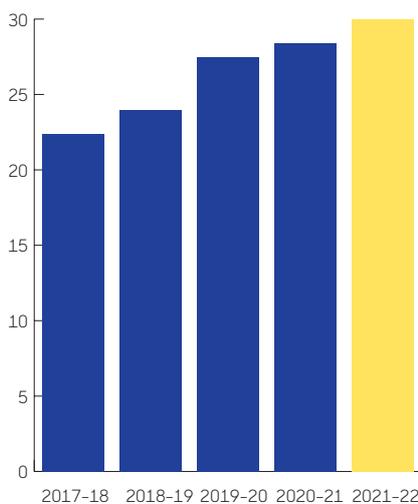
30,000+

calls to our Medico-legal Advisory Service

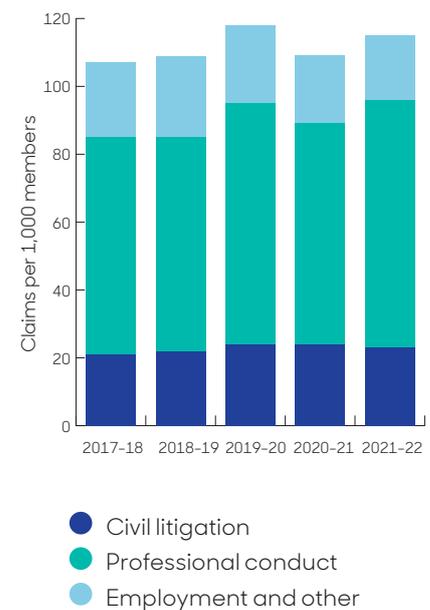


Medico-legal Advisory Service  
avant.org.au/mlas

Calls to Medico-legal Advisory Service ('000s)



Frequency by medico-legal claims type



\*Avant Member Survey June 2022



## Feeling well protected

Both my individual medical indemnity insurance and my practice insurance are with Avant. When I have had to call for advice in the past, it has been prompt and helpful both for myself as an individual practitioner and for my practice. I work with GP registrars as a medical educator and they frequently encounter challenging situations, so being able to call on a trusted medical indemnity provider is essential.

I attended one of Avant's events a few years ago, where Dr Richard Harris spoke about rescuing the Thai boys from the cave, and it was an amazing experience to hear from Richard directly. I also find the email updates and articles to be very helpful at keeping me up to date with emerging medico-legal risks. I feel well protected being indemnified with Avant.

Dr Penelope Need  
General practitioner, SA

in the previous year. Clinical records/ confidentiality and complaints were the next most common topics, which have been pushed down in the rankings by treatment issues.

The pandemic was also a common cause of members contacting us, with the rollout of the COVID vaccines raising many new medico-legal questions. Common topics included mandatory vaccination, mask mandates, movement restrictions, hospital in the home treatment arrangements and pauses in elective surgery.

Our experiences on these calls were useful in providing feedback to the Department of Health on the issues of concern to our members relating to COVID, and in developing information to share with members.

### A strong multi-disciplinary defence team

Avant has an extensive, multi-disciplinary defence team to ensure members have the appropriate skill sets and expertise for their unique situation. Our state-based teams provide local jurisdiction knowledge and on-the-ground presence, with the backing of the largest medical indemnity team in Australia.

This defence team is coordinated through claims managers, most of whom have legal or medical qualifications. They can draw on the knowledge of 23 medical advisers, on hand to provide clinical and peer support to members. Solicitors from across Avant and beyond can be sourced to secure the right team and experience.

Avant Law is our own incorporated legal practice, established to provide members with specialist medico-legal legal advice and representation from a team that focuses on health law. Avant Law's 82 medical indemnity solicitors continue to support and defend members with claims covered under their medical indemnity policy, and provide advice to help reduce the risk of a complaint or claim.

The firm was recognised by the industry, winning multiple international awards, including Lawyer International's – Legal 100 2021 and 2022 awards for Australian Law Firm of the Year (Medical Indemnity Insurance); and M&A Global Awards 2022 Law Firm of the Year (Medical Indemnity Insurance) – Australia.

Avant Law was also recognised in the Doyles Guide Insurance Law ranking for 2021, taking home awards for leading law firm and several of our staff for leading lawyers.

### Assisting safe practice

Our Risk Advisory Service (RAS) was set up to help members and practices identify the risks faced in delivering care and any areas that need improvement. Avant's RAS team has extensive knowledge of medico-legal risk to share so members can practise safely.

The advisers assisted 1,619 members and practices in 2021–22, including supporting members facing regulatory body investigations to help avoid or minimise sanctions. They also delivered 48 presentations to practice staff, navigating topical subjects such as non-compliance, privacy, medical records, the evolution of risk and the use of advertising and social media in medical practice.

### Fair pricing for extensive cover

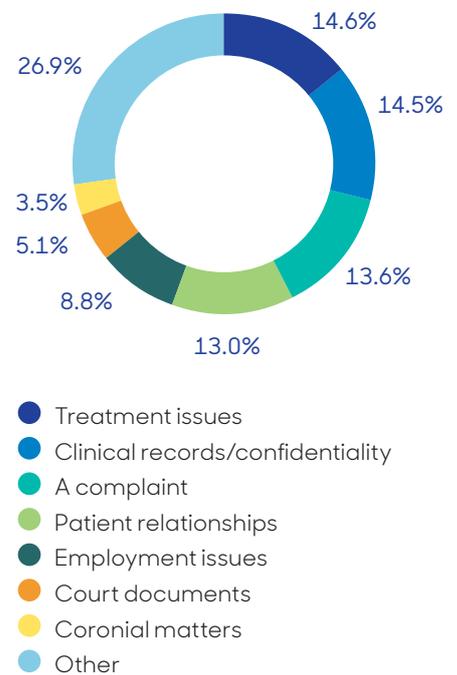
Keeping premiums stable has been a core principle for us and over the first two years of COVID, we held back premium increases wherever possible. Members whose billings were impacted by electives being cancelled, were able to contact us and reduce their premiums. The extensive nature of the policy cover was not impacted, which also protected those members offering COVID vaccinations.



Avant has always provided me with an efficient and caring service with advice that has successfully guided me through work-related issues.

Avant member

Medico-legal issues members called us about in 2021-22



increase in the frequency of professional conduct claims

Professional indemnity insurance products are issued by Avant Insurance Limited, ABN 82 003 707 471, AFSL 238 765 ('Avant Insurance'). The information provided by Avant Insurance is general advice only and has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation and needs. You should consider these, having regard to the appropriateness of the advice before deciding to purchase or continue to hold these products. For full details including the terms, conditions, and exclusions that apply, please read and consider the relevant Product Disclosure Statement or policy wording, which are available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) or by contacting Avant Insurance on 1800 128 268.

# Practice protection



2,928

practices protected  
by a practice medical  
indemnity insurance policy



3,900

calls from practices for  
medico-legal advice



Practice Medical  
Indemnity Insurance  
[avant.org.au/pmip](http://avant.org.au/pmip)

Running a medical practice comes with a set of issues that doctors may not have considered earlier in their careers. There are many ways the practice, including non-medical staff, practice systems and processes, can create issues across the business, which are reasons why many members are turning to Avant for protection.

## Peace of mind for practices

In 2021-22, 2,928 practices were protected by the policy, which was an increase of 4% from the previous year. Our practice medical indemnity insurance can support you to run a successful practice and offers peace of mind for you and your staff.

The policy covers the legal costs of defending the practice and its staff against allegations and complaints, as well as compensation amounts the practice may become liable to pay. It also has other features, including cover for employment issues, responding to a Medicare audit, complaints and investigations, and a range of other risks.

Importantly in the current environment, practices are covered for telehealth activities, including video conferencing and SMS, and issues arising from COVID vaccine risks, vaccinations, employment and safety advice.

## Practices needing support

The practice policy offers more than insurance cover. There is holistic support from our defence team, which includes medico-legal specialist claims managers, solicitors and medical advisers. Practices can also access our Medico-legal Advisory Service to help with difficult situations.

In the past financial year, we received almost 3,900 calls from practices for medico-legal advice, approximately a 30% increase from the previous

year. This is a significant number of calls coming from medical practices, considering we insure just under 3,000 practices, and shows our Medico-legal Advisory Service continues to be of high value, especially throughout the pandemic.

## Cyber insurance

Cyber incidents are highly prevalent in healthcare and Avant Cyber Insurance cover remains complimentary to Practice Medical Indemnity Policy holders. This is to protect practices against many of the common losses caused by a cyber incident.

This is valuable cover to our membership, as cyber incidents can have a significant impact on both doctors and practices.

Cyber Insurance includes cover for assistance if there has been a cyber attack on the practice, extortion, reputational expenses, privacy and security, business interruption and multimedia liability. This insurance also works in conjunction with Avant Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance, which assists if there has been a breach of privacy or confidentiality as a result of a cyber attack.

## Avant Business Insurance

Avant Business Insurance provides coverage options to protect medical practices' assets from unforeseen events. In 2021-22, 903 policies were in place to protect against losses from unexpected events. This totalled almost \$1.8m in gross premiums, a growth of 30% compared to last year. Similar to other natural disasters that have taken place in recent years, we offered support to members that were directly impacted by the floods.

**IMPORTANT:** Avant Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance is issued by Avant Insurance. The policy wording is available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) or by contacting us on 1800 128 268. Practices need to consider other forms of insurance including directors' and officers' liability, public and products liability, property and business interruption insurance, and workers' compensation. Avant Cyber Insurance cover is available to eligible Avant Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance policy holders up to the cessation of their policy and is provided under a group policy between Liberty Mutual Insurance Company ABN 61 086 083 605 and Avant Insurance.



## Giving us confidence in what we do

Having a practice policy with Avant is something I would not want to be without. It enables us to be preventative in our risk management by being able to seek advice regarding anything we may be working through. It is a fantastic professional service that I regularly use and highly value. I know that they are only a phone call away, and this provides the practice with guidance and gives us confidence in what we do.

Cecily Igglesden  
Practice manager  
Prospect Medical Centre, TAS

Dr Sujata Kohli and Phillipa Boyd  
Prospect Medical Centre, TAS

# Supporting doctors through their lives and careers

Avant offers more than quality medical indemnity. You receive holistic support to help you practise at your best, and access to products and services to assist you through your life and career.

Life & career support



## Support for exams, OSCEs and placements

Resources to help development of core soft skills for doctors



## Starting a research project?

Funding through the Early Career Doctor Research grants



## Buying a car?

Personal loans through Kooyong finance



## Going on holiday?

Protection with Avant Travel Cover including COVID cover



## Taking care of your health

Doctors' Health Fund private health insurance

## Medical school

Student membership with Avant means you will be backed by the largest in-house specialist medico-legal team of any medical defence organisation in Australia.

- ✓ Free indemnity cover to provide peace of mind

## Early career

### Interns and RMO1

Start practising with confidence, knowing your career and health are protected.

- ✓ Free indemnity cover to provide peace of mind
- ✓ Free Lite Extras Cover through Doctors' Health Fund, providing access to benefits including dental and optical
- ✓ Membership years count towards your Avant Loyalty Reward Plan tenure calculations

### Doctors in Training

Avant offers leading support and advice, ensuring peace of mind that your career and reputation are protected.

- ✓ Practitioner Indemnity Insurance
- ✓ Avant Doctor in Training Advisory Council

## Fellowship

When you fellow, you'll have many decisions to make; from joining or starting a private practice, or staying in the hospital system, Avant supports you through this key stage of your career.

- ✓ Practitioner Indemnity Insurance, cover for your specialty
- ✓ Getting Started in Private Practice premium pricing reduction – 1st Year 80%, 2nd 60%, 3rd 40%, 4th 20%

Medical indemnity protection

## Membership benefits

### Largest medico-legal team

A 302-strong team\*, including one of Australia's largest medical indemnity law firms, recognised for their expertise, providing members with on-the-ground support across Australia.

\*Accurate as at 30/06/2022

### Avant Medico-legal Advisory Service

Our medico-legal experts are available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year - after hours and on weekends in emergencies.

### Avant Learning Centre

We provide members with information and resources developed by our experts on best practice for a multitude of common situations doctors and practices face.



### Buying a property?

Avant Law can help with conveyancing and property law

Home and investment property loans through Kooyong finance for doctors



### Starting a family?

Avant Law assistance with setting up trusts and wills

Life Insurance Selection Tool making it easy to find the right cover to protect your loved ones



### Undertaking research?

Avant Foundation and other grants



### Planning for life after medicine

Protect your assets, succession plan, set up powers of attorney and wills through Avant Law.



## Practice ownership

Avant offers a wide range of products and services to support practices.

### Protecting your practice

**Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance**  
Cover to protect your practice and your team.\*

**Business Insurance**  
Cover for your practice's property, loss of revenue, income or profit, management and public liability.

**Cyber Insurance**  
Cover for practice electronic data and digital assets.

### Establishing good governance and processes

**Avant Risk Advisory Service support :**  
Our risk advisers support members in minimising the medico-legal risks for them and their practices. Support for members facing regulatory body investigations has helped avoid or minimise sanctions.

### PracticeHub

An online medical practice management software platform, that helps make running a modern healthcare practice simpler, safer and more efficient.

### Team Medical Supplies

PracticeHub customers can access Team Medical's extensive range of high-quality products at competitive prices.

### Finance and commercial arrangements

**Avant Business Finance (Kooyong)**  
Practice finance, fit-out loans, equipment finance, goodwill borrowing, practice overdrafts.

### Avant Law

Commercial and corporate advice on contracting and growing your business.

\*Staff will not be covered when they are acting in their capacity as a Medical Practitioner.

## Growing your career

The challenges you face are always changing, so we continue to develop our indemnity policy, giving you peace of mind that you have the right level of protection.

- ✓ Practitioner Indemnity Insurance, cover for your specialty
- ✓ Retirement Reward Plan personal notional allocation
- ✓ Avant Loyalty Reward Plan, offering tenure based discounts on indemnity premiums

## Retirement

Guidance on winding down from practice.

- ✓ Retirement Reward Plan dividend†
- ✓ Run-off Cover for indemnity protection after you cease private practice in Australia.

### Avant Personal Support Program

We provide a range of support options to members who are experiencing health issues, including six sessions of confidential, external counselling provided by Benestar.

### Avant Retirement Reward Plan

A unique benefit for eligible members, this gives us the ability to return surplus capital to eligible members by way of dividend†, when they permanently retire from paid medical practice.

### Avant Foundation and other grants

These programs provide funding to support research, quality improvement projects, education and leadership programs to eligible recipients.

### Webinars and newsletters

Keeping members informed with developments in regulation, best practice, case studies and leading industry insights.

† Issuing of dividend is entirely at the discretion of the Avant Mutual Board

# Doctors' Health Fund



**Dr Gillian Farrell**  
Plastic surgeon, VIC  
Avant Mutual and Doctors' Health Fund Director

Avant's 'by doctors, for doctors' ethos is exemplified by Doctors' Health Fund with members being both customers and providers of healthcare. The fund has always sought to ensure fairness and value, whichever side of the service you are on. This has been demonstrated most recently through our management of premiums and initiatives to give back to members throughout the pandemic.

Doctors' Health Fund's ethos and the value offered is clearly appreciated, as membership has quadrupled in the decade since becoming part of Avant.

Our health cover is designed exclusively for doctors and the medical community. We believe this has been a key factor in the fund's growth, along with a reputation of strong customer service and quality health insurance products.

## Strong membership growth

This year, we celebrated 10 years since Doctors' Health Fund was acquired by Avant. Since 2012, Doctors' Health Fund has grown to insure 33,519 memberships and cover 64,518 lives. The fund has consistently led the market in member growth as one of the fastest growing health funds in Australia.

Doctors' Health Fund welcomed 5,696 new members in 2021-22, an increase of more than 20%. This growth was boosted by Avant interns and first year Registered Medical Officers on our exclusive and Avant-subsidised Lite Extras Cover, to assist those starting out in medicine to access private health cover. Throughout the year, a number of these early career doctors upgraded to hospital cover with Doctors' Health Fund.

Across the industry, participation in private health insurance continued to grow, with over 45% of the population holding hospital cover and over half having extras cover\*. This growth reversed longer-term trends of declining participation, reinforcing the value and access private health insurance provides and the strength of our dual public/private system.

## A quality service designed for doctors

At Doctors' Health Fund we strongly believe that doctors should be appropriately remunerated for their services and patients should be able to limit out-of-pocket costs.

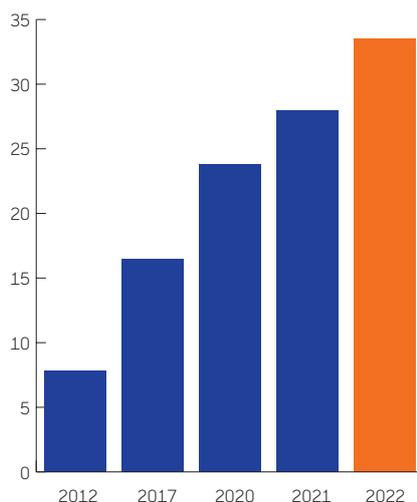
Our Top Cover Gold hospital cover provides unrivalled cover for out-of-pocket costs, paying medical benefits up to the Australian Medical Association list of services and fees. This unique gap cover not only helps to minimise or eliminate gaps for our members but also supports the medical profession through fair and reasonable remuneration for their services.

Members are not restricted by preferred provider networks and extras benefits are paid regardless of the provider they choose. Our philosophy is that members know who is best to treat them, and their health insurance should respond when and where they need it.

An outstanding 95% of members were satisfied with the service they received, as recorded in our latest annual member satisfaction survey. Members provided positive responses for our reliability, personal service and staff attentiveness.

Our responsiveness by answering 92% of calls in under 30 seconds demonstrates the value we provide to our members and shows that we understand the unique constraints on our members' time. This response rate is a key point of difference with other health funds in the market.

## 10-year growth in memberships ('000s)



33,000+  
memberships

95%

member satisfaction

## Improving accessibility and affordability

Ensuring young Australians remain covered by private health insurance is essential for its sustainability. On 1 April 2022 we implemented a new reform, allowing dependants to stay on their family's policy for longer. A dependant can now remain on their family's policy until their 32nd birthday, which has increased from 25 years.

On 1 June 2022, we implemented another reform, allowing dependants with disability to stay on their family's policy with no age limit. We are proud to be able to deliver these initiatives for our families and younger members and improve affordability and accessibility for the industry as a whole.

## Giving back to members

We continued to face challenges as a community with lockdowns and social distancing restrictions to manage the spread of COVID, leading to another year of lower healthcare usage and claims volatility.

In March 2022, we announced additional initiatives to return surplus profit, such as a six-month freeze on premiums, which means our usual 1 April premium increases were deferred to 1 October 2022. The average increase of 2.28% is the lowest in 20 years.

It has been our ongoing commitment to support our members and give back any savings that result from the pandemic. Since the pandemic began, we have returned a total of

\$12.4m in surplus premium and other support initiatives, with the latest cash payments confirmed in June 2022.

Our initiatives have ensured that our average surplus over the three COVID years has been very close to the target set to sustain Doctors' Health Fund into the future.

\*Quarterly private health insurance statistics - highlights. APRA (June 2022). Accessible at [www.apra.gov.au](http://www.apra.gov.au)



Doctors' Health Fund  
[doctorshealthfund.com.au](http://doctorshealthfund.com.au)

## Support and give-back initiatives for members

### Stage 1: March-April 2020



Premium increases postponed from 1 April to 1 October 2020



Financial hardship support  
*Still available*



Coverage for telehealth  
*Still available*



Increased mental health benefits  
*Permanent*

### Stage 2: May-June 2020



Two-month premium reductions on hospital and extras policies (average return of \$161 per member)

### Stage 3: October 2020



Premium increases postponed again for Victorian members from 1 October to 1 January 2021 due to the extended lockdown

### Stage 4: April 2021 *Permanent*



Lung & Chest category added to Smart Starter Bronze Plus, meaning all members with a hospital policy are covered if admitted as a private patient due to COVID

### Stage 5: February 2022



Premium increases postponed from 1 April to 1 October 2022

### Stage 6: July 2022



Cash payments announced to return claims savings. Payments of up to \$217 were made in August 2022



2.28%

This year's average annual premium increase, our lowest increase in 20 years



IMPORTANT: Private health insurance products are issued by The Doctors' Health Fund Pty Limited, ABN 68 001 417 527 (Doctors' Health Fund), a member of the Avant Mutual Group. Cover is subject to the terms and conditions (including waiting periods, limitations and exclusions) of the individual policy, available at [doctorshealthfund.com.au/our-cover](http://doctorshealthfund.com.au/our-cover).



## Appreciation as both doctors and patients

When we first joined Doctors' Health Fund, it was a pleasant surprise to not have to pay any out-of-pocket expenses for our dental care. We love having the excellent extras cover, and the experience of using the app was quick and easy.

As a doctor, I certainly appreciate it when I see a patient using Doctors' Health Fund. I notice they compensate us more than other funds, which means less out-of-pocket expenses for the patient.

Most importantly, it's the reassurance of care that keeps us satisfied as Doctors' Health Fund members. It's having the comfort of knowing my family is protected and assured that Doctors' Health Fund is there for us, especially since we have plans for a growing family in the future.

**Dr Dean Conrad**  
Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, NSW

**Dr Debbie Lim**  
General practitioner, NSW

# Avant Law expanded services



**Dr Douglas Travis**  
Urologist, VIC  
Avant Mutual Director

It can be hard to find lawyers who understand how our profession affects other aspects of our lives, and that legal issues and life administration need time and attention we can't always spare.

Having its own law firm has allowed Avant's lawyers to focus solely on serving members and to build a deep understanding of doctors.

Building on its medical indemnity reputation, Avant Law can now help you with more aspects of your life and medical career.



**Avant Law**  
[avant.law.com.au](http://avant.law.com.au)



We felt very lucky being matched with a solicitor who had the industry experience. Not only did he have a legal mind, but he could put a practical application to it which was extremely reassuring. He was prepared to invest the time to assist us and was quickly able to put a framework around what needed to be done.

Avant Law client

Avant Law has been supporting and protecting doctors with medical indemnity matters for many years. Following feedback from members, we are very excited to have expanded our legal services to help doctors with their personal, professional and business legal needs.

To deliver these new services, Avant Law recruited additional lawyers with the experience to help with matters ranging from developing a will to managing and selling a practice. Avant Law is the place to find lawyers who understand doctors and their practices.

## Expanded legal services offerings

Our expanded legal team offers a range of new services beyond medical indemnity, on a fee-for-service basis.

### Commercial & corporate

Legal advice on day-to-day commercial contracting and growing your business. Support for you and your business from starting to selling, and every step in between.

### Data protection & privacy

Legal advice on data protection and information storage, and security requirements for medical practices.

### Dispute resolution & litigation

Help to resolve your personal and business disputes. From managing suppliers to investigating employee complaints and resolving disputes with your landlord.

### Employment & workplace

Legal support across all areas of workplace law, for businesses and individuals.

### Estate planning & probate

Legal support to protect your assets and manage your personal affairs.

### Property

Guiding you through your personal and practice property transactions including purchase and sale, leasing and development.

### Medical indemnity unchanged

Importantly, there will be no change to the existing services the Avant Law medical indemnity team currently provides members. Members still have access to the largest medical indemnity team in Australia. No Australian medical defence organisation has more medico-legal expertise to defend you than Avant - whatever your situation.



Left to right: Avant Law employees; Ren Li, Annabelle Lowing, Patrick Esplin and Blade Atton.

# Financial services for doctors



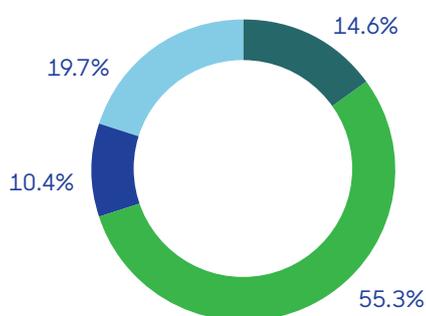
23%

growth in life insurance customers

\$799m

in loans by Kooyong

Kooyong loans by purpose  
Total 1,149



- Business financing
- Residential property
- Commercial property
- Asset finance, cars and equipment

Avant has been developing extended financial services to provide tailored products and services for doctors, since 2017. This year has seen changes to our offerings as we strive to present members the best solutions in response to changes in regulation.

## New life insurance selection tool

Following the Royal Commission into banking, life insurance product requirements changed and Avant looked to find how best to service members' life insurance needs. One challenge for doctors looking for the most suitable product is the time it takes to research the options available and understand how they compare.

To make this easier, we reviewed leading life insurance providers and made a shortlist of four whose products have features and benefits we think doctors will value.

In November 2021, we launched our new Life Insurance Selection Tool (LIST) to supersede our previous offerings. The LIST places a curated selection of life insurance products at your fingertips, making finding the right life insurance policy easy. This curated list only includes those that met our strict criteria.

Despite the need to adapt to the changes in the market, we have grown the number of members insured by 23% in 2021-22, and now protect over 2,100 members.

## Exiting financial advice

Avant has always prioritised its members' interests first and foremost, which is why any wider business decision comes after heavy deliberation and careful planning.

In line with what is happening in the industry, the regulatory environment has been challenging the sustainability of financial advice. While we still believe in the value of advice, the use

of member resources is critical, and therefore we made the decision to cease the provision of holistic personal financial advice in 2022.

To support members who may require financial advice in the future, we created a directory of advice firms whom members may wish to consider in meeting their advice needs. The firms on the directory have committed to providing preferential terms to Avant members.

Avant continues to support our members in the provision of advice across critical insurance areas such as life insurance, income protection, death and permanent disability, trauma, business expenses insurance, buy/sell agreements and group schemes.

## Finance for doctors

Avant is in the third year of its partnership with Kooyong, a specialist lender for doctors. Kooyong secures finance for doctors by understanding and explaining their unique circumstances to a prospective lender. With access to a range of lenders, including those who offer preferential service, Kooyong can often save time, money and financial headaches.

By understanding what lenders require, doctors' unique income streams, career journeys and most importantly, credit character, Kooyong can make the process of financing a home, investment property, medical equipment or practice quicker and easier.

In 2021-22, Kooyong financed 1,149 loans that amounted to \$799m.



Avant Financial Services  
[avant.org.au/financial-services](http://avant.org.au/financial-services)



“

Since joining Avant in 2004, I've always felt confident that I was well protected. My interactions with them have been efficient and considerate of my personal situation. They have a great range of products and I've had excellent support, no matter what the product.

Dr Maylene Pineda  
Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, NSW

# Technologies improving healthcare operations



**Dr Steven Hambleton**  
General practitioner, QLD  
Avant Mutual Director

Healthcare technologies have produced great benefits to patients and to the efficiency of healthcare delivery. These benefits align with Avant's purpose of providing confidence to doctors so they can keep serving the community, and is why we have invested in technologies that support our purpose.

Many of the best innovations come from those involved with healthcare provision, which is the case for the PracticeHub and myBeepr tools. Our investment in these technologies has meant they could be developed to drive greater efficiency, safety and quality in healthcare delivery.



1,114

practices subscribing to the PracticeHub platform

15,000+

staff supported by PracticeHub

Delivering healthcare requires a coordinated team with good systems and processes. PracticeHub simplifies this to help practices operate efficiently and safely.

The cloud-based system has developed to be more useful than ever in helping practices respond to additional pressures of the current environment. New features have been added regularly since its launch five years ago, as we respond to feedback from users and changes in healthcare provision.

## Steady growth

PracticeHub grew 7% against the previous financial year, with 1,114 practices now using the system to support more than 15,000 practice staff. Part of this growth was from securing relationships with some large practice groups.

## Saves time and reduces risk

Our two applications launched last year, Certificate of Insurance (CoI) and Ahpra Alerts, continued to be taken up by practices. The CoI application was created to reduce the administrative burden of credentialing by helping practices to collect, manage and securely store the certificates of insurance for practice staff.

As an Avant member, a doctor's certificate of insurance can be automatically sent directly from Avant, which saves time and effort in medical indemnity insurance management.

The Ahpra Alerts app offers direct integration with Ahpra and automatically informs practices when there is a change in a practitioner's registration status. The app automates information collection from the 15 health and medical boards overseeing the registrations of health workers, including doctors, allied health professionals and nurses.

This reduces the administrative burden for practice staff and lowers the risk should a healthcare worker forget to renew or update their registration.

## Step up in support

To assist managers and owners in running their practices, a series of monthly webinars has been held, which have attracted nearly 2,000 attendees. Topics were varied and included directors' duties, risk management, recruitment, complaints management, data-driven practice improvements, specialist practice accreditation, and the primary healthcare 10-year plan.

In addition, to help users get more out of PracticeHub, we ran monthly webinars and open forums on the best ways to use the platform. Along with our monthly newsletters, these activities have aided PracticeHub users to optimise use of the many features the system offers.

## Team Medical Supplies partnership

PracticeHub is designed to simplify daily operations for practices, and this year we extended this to streamline the ordering and supply of medical products. In April 2022, we announced our partnership with Team Medical Supplies, a family-owned company known for its commitment to quality and excellent customer service to businesses across Australia.

PracticeHub customers can access Team Medical's extensive range of high-quality products at competitive prices, with the convenience of ordering through the PracticeHub platform. Nearly 200 practices are already using the Team Medical feature in PracticeHub.



PracticeHub  
practicehub.com.au

### meXus for hospitals

Created specifically for hospitals, meXus aims to simplify management and compliance tasks. The automated certificate of insurance and Ahpra Alerts features reduce human error, improve the accuracy of reporting, and reduce the organisation's risk exposure. Going into its second year, this platform streamlines healthcare administration so doctors can continue to deliver high-quality patient care.

Since its official launch last year, eight hospitals across Australia have signed on to use the meXus platform, with a further 81 hospitals using our Col integration, which provides automated certificates of insurance to the hospital for more than 11,000 practitioners.



11,000+  
practitioners using the  
Certificate of Insurance  
service

*Below: Phillipa Boyd and Rachael Brooker  
at Prospect Medical Centre, TAS*

### myBeepr: Connect with care

myBeepr is an alternative to instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp, but it is specifically designed for the healthcare setting. It allows doctors to share messages, photos and other vital information, securely with other medical professionals.

Since Avant took a majority stake to further enable myBeepr's development, myBeepr has grown to be used in 16 hospitals across several states. It is on track to become the country's most widely adopted bespoke communications platform for healthcare. myBeepr has been associated with a more than 90% user uptake and engagement across its implementations.

Significant benefits of myBeepr include:

- reduced communication loop times
- fast communication of critical test results
- 90% reduction in the use of non-secure messaging platforms
- reduce burden on hospital switchboard
- compliance with national healthcare regulations and laws.

Avant continues to work with myBeepr towards more healthcare-specific features. The platform will also be made available to the private hospital sector, as well as GPs and specialists working in the primary care setting.



Having a secure messaging system that has a contact list linked to a live directory is a lot more efficient than calling switchboard or looking up rosters or contact lists.

Chief Medical Information Officer St George Hospital



# Avant Travel Cover

3,107

Avant Travel Cover policies issued

84% 

would recommend Avant Travel Cover



Avant Travel Cover  
[avant.org.au/travel](http://avant.org.au/travel)

After nearly two years of shutting its borders to the rest of the world, Australia allowed fully vaccinated citizens and permanent residents to travel overseas without an exemption as of November 2021.

Avant understands the need for our members to be covered, should they be diagnosed with COVID while traveling. Being covered for COVID-related illnesses was a feature commonly removed by the travel insurers during the pandemic. As of 1 July 2022, we are pleased to be offering this coverage to our members.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our travel cover remains a highly valued product, a survey showing 84% of members with the product stating they would be likely to recommend it to a colleague.

As a result of several factors including increased claims and, most importantly, COVID cases, premiums for travel cover across the industry have increased this year. Our pricing

has been adapted to offer the best possible value while maintaining excellent coverage.

Avant Travel Cover still covers an unlimited number of trips (up to six months' travel per trip), as doctors tell us they spend short periods working overseas or take extended breaks. It also covers accompanying spouse and dependent children.

Members have 24/7 emergency assistance for when things go wrong, and most importantly, it covers you for unlimited medical expenses incurred overseas.

**IMPORTANT:** Avant Travel Cover is available under a Group Policy between QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited (ABN 78 003 191 035, AFSL 239545) and Avant Mutual Group Limited (ABN 58 123 154 898). Avant Travel Cover is underwritten by QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited ABN 78 003 191 035 AFSL 239545. For full details including the restrictions, terms, conditions and exclusions that apply, please read and consider the Product Disclosure Statement, available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) or by calling us on 1800 128 268. An excess may apply, depending on policy and claim type.



# Avant Foundation and other grants



**Dr Jan Dudley**

Obstetrician & gynaecologist, NSW  
Avant Mutual Director

Improving the care we provide patients is a natural desire for doctors. Avant Foundation and other grants are initiatives established by the Avant Board to support research projects that advance the provision of healthcare. It is one way we honour our commitment to support doctors looking to make a difference.

The Foundation gives Avant a unique opportunity to promote the sustainability of the medical profession by supporting and advocating for quality, safety and professionalism. Since its inception in 2017, the Foundation has supported some of Australia's top researchers and healthcare leaders to improve both medical practice and patient care.

With medical practice today becoming increasingly complex, the Avant Foundation and Avant's other grants and scholarships programs support outstanding research, education and leadership projects in medicine.

Committed to the advancement of healthcare, Avant supports education initiatives which foster leadership in quality and safety in medicine. In 2021, we established a Coaching Collaborative program, bringing together emerging and experienced researchers through a research-centred coaching program.

Research topics we awarded in 2022 include using home spirometry to manage rural and regional patients with airway stenosis during the pandemic; a multi-platform clinical training suite to improve artificial heart-lung therapy safety and effectiveness; and delivering timely care using remotely collected patient reported outcome measures.

Expressions of interest for 2023 Avant Foundation grants will be open from late 2022.

## Early Career Research Program

Ten years ago, Avant launched the Doctor in Training Scholarship Program to support members to achieve their research ambitions. This program has been enhanced to become the Early Career Research Program. It offers additional elements to support early career researchers to build their capabilities through a range of research grants, research coaching and research skills development.

We've also introduced microgrants offering \$5,000 to support smaller projects and pre-clinical trial work, such as literature or systematic reviews or a pilot to test a concept. As part of the microgrant, recipients also receive one-on-one coaching from grants and scholarships alumni, to provide a

strong foundation for building critical research capabilities. The one-on-one coaching guides recipients through their research challenges and is a key part of the Coaching Collaborative program.

The research skills development program, with access to the Stanford Online Medical Statistics Program is also new. In medicine, the ability to ask the right research question and interpret data is an essential skill, and the Medical Statistics Program introduces statistical concepts and techniques commonly used in medical research.

The 2022 Avant Early Career Research Program encourages early career researchers to explore their research idea and gain the necessary skills to follow their research through to publishing. We are pleased to be supporting early career doctors in making the most of their research opportunities as part of training to become the doctor they want to be.

Applications for the 2023 Early Career Research Program open in March 2023.

## Continuing professional development for practice managers

With healthcare becoming increasingly complex, the way a practice is managed plays a critical role in patient outcomes. Avant and the Australian Association of Practice Management (AAPM) have partnered since 2014 to offer professional development courses to practice managers.

In 2021, Avant and AAPM jointly awarded three fully-funded scholarships to study practice management at University of New England Partnerships. The programs are designed to help practice managers adapt to the changing environment, enhance healthcare delivery and better meet patient needs.



\$524,000

in Avant grants

\$450,000

in DiT scholarships



Avant Foundation  
[avantdifference.org.au](http://avantdifference.org.au)

## Avant Foundation grant recipients



### University of Newcastle

A/Prof Lisa Lampe  
Psychiatrist, NSW

#### Boundary crossings as a risk to patient health and professional longevity in medicine

"Doctors need to navigate boundaries within the doctor-patient relationship, but also appropriate professional boundaries with peers, friends, family and students under their tutelage. The potential for adverse consequences makes it clear that ability to recognise and manage boundary challenges is a priority for safe medical practice. At the same time, navigating these challenges can be stressful. This research looks at how frequently boundary challenges are experienced, associations with stress and burnout, and what personal and professional problems may follow boundary crossings."



### Eastern Health

Dr Philip Choi  
Neurologist, VIC

#### Bridging the Urban and regional Divide in Stroke care (BUILDS): a pilot study

"A stroke occurs every 19 minutes nationwide in Australia. Along with intravenous thrombolysis, specialised care provided through an acute stroke unit has been proven to be one of the most important interventions for improving patient outcomes in stroke. This study will assess the feasibility of establishing a new tele-stroke unit service to improve inpatient care and access to subspecialist input during their stay."

## Congratulations

### 2021 AAPM scholarship recipients

Belle Paton, NSW  
Sam Longworth, VIC  
Janelle Vandyke, VIC

### 2021 Doctor in Training Research Scholarship Program recipients

Dr Umar Ali, WA  
Dr Tejas Singh, QLD  
Dr Thomas Goubar, NSW  
Dr Michael Zhu, ACT  
Dr Al-Rahim Habib, QLD  
Dr Lucy Huang, SA  
Dr Mina Kang, NSW  
Dr Natasha Pritchard, VIC  
Dr Yi Chao Foong, VIC  
Dr Daniel Cox, VIC  
Dr Alex Wood, WA  
Dr Mihir Shanker, QLD  
Dr Lydia Pathmanathan, VIC  
Dr Dhivya Thangavel, QLD  
Dr Tao (Daniel) Xing, VIC  
Dr Afaf Abed, WA  
Dr Aysha Al-Ani, VIC  
Dr Sulakchanan Anandabaskaran, NSW  
Dr Ouli Xie, NT

### Avant Grant recipients

Austin Health (A/Prof Mark Howard)  
Austin Hospital (Dr Andrew Casamento)  
Monash Health (Dr Anthony Rotman)  
Monash University (A/Prof Vincent Pellegrino)  
St John of God (Dr Nicole Ghedina)  
St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (A/Prof Jess Howell)  
Royal Melbourne Hospital (Professor Jennifer Philip)  
University of Tasmania (Professor Richard Turner)

Below: Dr Mina Kang, Doctor in Training Research Scholarship recipient 2021.





“

I don't want my life experiences to be an excuse not to succeed; I want my life to be the reason for my success.

## Bursaries supporting Indigenous students in driving change

As the recipient of a first-year Indigenous medical student bursary this year, Shontae Coyne is more committed than ever to improve Indigenous health and help young doctors close the gap.

"I want to provide an environment where my patients feel safe and comfortable," explained Shontae, a proud Whadjuk/Noongar woman from Perth, WA, with ties to multiple language groups extending as far north as Derby and as far south as Albany.

"The only way we can see change among the Indigenous community is by being in the roles of doctors and leaders, to ensure the change happens. Our elders have been the catalyst in the past, but we need to make sure that change continues."

A first-year student at Curtin University studying Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, Shontae is living on campus and experiencing the shock from high costs of living and being away from her family for the first time.

The bursary awarded to Shontae will go towards accommodation, books, tuition, and the technology required to be successful in her studies.

The Avant Foundation provides a bursary of up to \$30,000 to the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) to support two first-year Indigenous medical students chosen by Flinders Adelaide Indigenous Medical Mentoring.

Applications for 2023 should be made directly with AIDA.

**Shontae Coyne**  
Student, WA

# Advocating for members



## Dr Michael Wright

Avant Chief Medical Officer  
General practitioner, NSW

The saying that 'the only constant is change', has never been more evident in healthcare due to the pandemic and our response to it continues. Change often results in additional layers of bureaucracy and constantly changing requirements make it hard to keep abreast of them all.

Avant continuously advocates on behalf of members to policy makers and regulators for a fair environment for doctors. We also work tirelessly to ensure the impact of major changes is clearly communicated to members.

COVID continued to be the key challenge for doctors over the last year. The good news was that we saw rapid uptake in COVID vaccinations. However, members continued to face issues such as staff shortages, confused and anxious patients, delays in elective surgery, inconsistent information and support for primary care, and overwhelmed emergency departments and hospitals. For doctors in training, the pandemic continued to disrupt their training programs and exams.

The strong relationships we developed with the Commonwealth Department of Health, the AMA, and RACGP, allowed us to continue to engage with key stakeholders including participation at regular Peak Body meetings and the Department of Health COVID Forum. In the COVID context, in 2021–22 we were successful in advocating for:

- supporting permanent rollout of telehealth
- reducing compliance burden on primary care providers participating in the COVID vaccine rollout.
- extending image-based prescribing, which was introduced as an interim measure pending the introduction of e-prescribing.

## No-fault COVID indemnity scheme

Avant, with other medical defence organisations, was successful in influencing the Department of Health to implement a no-fault COVID vaccine indemnity scheme, which meant doctors were not burdened with claims relating to COVID vaccinations.

The new no-fault indemnity scheme came into effect in September 2021. It covers the costs of injuries above \$5,000 due to a proven adverse reaction of a COVID vaccination. In November 2021, another announcement reduced the claim threshold to cover the costs of injuries above \$1,000.

## Making telehealth permanent

Avant was at the forefront of lobbying for the introduction of telehealth at the start of the pandemic. Further activity and feedback was provided on the necessity of maintaining telehealth, so it was pleasing to see its extension until the end of that year.

Subsequently, in December 2021, the federal government confirmed it will commit \$106m to make telehealth a permanent feature of primary healthcare. The service has been transformational to healthcare delivery and connected millions of people to their doctors, while being kept safely at home throughout the pandemic.

## Voluntary assisted dying

All states have now passed legislation legalising voluntary assisted dying. Western Australia's voluntary assisted dying legislation, passed in 2019, came into effect on 1 July 2021.

Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland have all passed legislation to legalise voluntary assisted dying in 2021. Avant provided input for a study run by Griffith University researching the strategies, resources and other factors that should be considered as health services in Queensland to prepare for voluntary assisted dying. Queensland's legislation is expected to start on 1 January 2023; Tasmania in October 2023; and SA is also likely to implement in 2023.

NSW was the final state to legalise voluntary assisted dying. Avant made submissions to the NSW Parliament's inquiry into the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* and the legislation was passed in May 2022 and will come into effect in late 2023.

Currently, the ACT and Northern Territory are prevented from passing voluntary assisted dying legislation due to Commonwealth legislation passed two decades ago that overturned the Northern Territory's then *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*. There is legislation currently before the Commonwealth parliament that restores the territories' rights to make laws in this regard. If this legislation is passed, it is likely that these jurisdictions will also legalise voluntary assisted dying.

### Medical regulation

The way medical regulatory authorities regulate the conduct of doctors is an area of great interest for our members. We continue to advocate for a fair approach that educates and for any sanctions to be proportionate.

Avant provided submissions to, and gave evidence before, two parliamentary committee inquiries during the year. The first, a Senate inquiry into Ahpra's administration of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, looked at issues including the regulation of health practitioners, handling and assessing notifications and the impact on practitioners, unregulated professions, the registration process and examining systemic issues. There were 14 recommendations made in the Committee's April 2022 report.

The second was the Queensland Health and Environment Committee inquiry into proposed amendments to the National Health Practitioner Regulation legislation (the National Law).

Submissions were also made to two consultations relevant to the regulation of cosmetic practitioners:

- The Consultation Regulation Impact Statement on the use of the title 'surgeon' by medical practitioners
- Ahpra's independent review of the regulation of health practitioners in cosmetic surgery.

### Contributing to good solutions

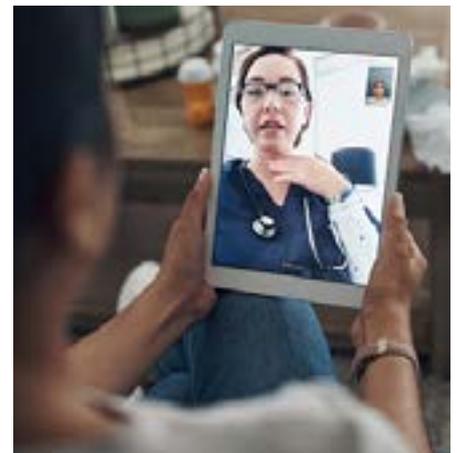
Avant worked closely with the RACGP, providing input to its resource for GPs for managing aggressive patients and its draft education module on nicotine vaping in light of scheduling changes. Input was also provided to the RACGP's Medicare compliance group and to the Department of Health's online Medicare compliance portal, which aims at digitising the process of responding to compliance activities.

### Real-time prescription monitoring system expansion

Inappropriate use of controlled medicines including opioids and benzodiazepines, is an important public health issue and inappropriate prescribing can give rise to significant medico-legal risk. Real-time prescription monitoring (RTPM) is designed to make controlled medicine prescribing and dispensing data accessible to practitioners at the time of care, to better inform clinical decision making. Queensland's RTPM system, QScript, went live in September 2021. This makes Queensland the second state where it is mandatory for GPs and pharmacists to check when prescribing or dispensing drugs of dependence.

New South Wales rolled out the first stage of its new RTPM, SafeScript NSW, in November 2021, progressively implementing it throughout the state over the next six months. SafeScript is not yet mandatory in NSW, but South Australia, Victoria, the ACT and Tasmania all have RTPM systems.

All states and territories are working towards integrating their systems with the Australian Government's National Data Exchange, which will allow relevant information to be shared to produce real-time detection and alerts for regulators, prescribers and dispensers.



I appreciate the advocacy work Avant is involved in and have always found interactions with Avant [staff] members to be professional, personable and helpful.

Avant member

# Supporting the profession

Our purpose is to provide confidence to doctors so they can keep serving the community. Support for the profession is a key aspect in meeting this purpose.

A total of \$530,000 was invested in activities with medical colleges, societies and associations in 2021-22. These arrangements enable advancements in education, research and advocacy activities that improve medical practice for the benefit of doctors and patients.



## \$530,000

invested in support and partnership activities



## 626

events supporting the medical community

### Partnering across specialities

The start of 2022 saw a return of face-to-face events, as more partners adapted to the 'new normal' of hosting combined physical and hybrid events. Avant played an active role in sponsoring several national conferences during this time, after they had been disrupted in the past two years.

Avant continues to support the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand (USANZ) registrar SET programs. Avant is involved in the SET programs across these specialities through sponsorship and delivering education on relevant medico-legal risk topics.

The Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA) held successful branch meetings in Queensland and Victoria, followed by their Knowledge Summit in North Queensland, with Avant's support and representation. We also support AOA's SET program, providing bespoke education at their trainees' annual Bone Camp event.

Avant continues to work closely with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, supporting their International Women's Day events and their Annual Scientific Congress, and partner with the Australasian Gynaecological Endoscopy and Surgery (AGES) Society, sponsoring their annual Pelvic Floor Symposium.

### Keeping you up to date

Our monthly newsletters keep members abreast of the latest developments in regulations and best practice, and the ever-popular case studies are reminders of how to avoid or manage undesirable situations. Newsletters are tailored for career stage and specialty, with 16 different versions being regularly delivered through the year. It is pleasing to see members continuing to appreciate the content - some newsletters being opened by an incredible 70% of recipients.

Our twice yearly print magazine, *Connect*, gives members a wealth of articles including case studies, member profiles and industry insights from our different businesses.

### Ask the Expert

Doctors were also kept informed through the 'Ask the Expert' webinars, which began at the start of the pandemic and have seen over 8,300 attendees since launch. In 2021-22, we held 111 online events, including eight 'Ask the Expert' webinars, and delivered 56 face-to-face activities. The two most popular topics were updates on COVID and the current issues in Medicare for general practitioners.

While 2021-22 saw a blend of in-person and online events, attendance had shown that online allowed for a significantly broader reach and the ability to watch later on-demand. All our webinars are uploaded to our YouTube channel, which had 36 new videos added in 2021-22. These have proven popular with a total of 13,536 views, a considerable increase from 2,171 the year before.

You can visit our YouTube channel at: [youtube.com/c/AvantMutual](https://youtube.com/c/AvantMutual)

## 111



online education events delivered

### Continuing to support mental health

Long hours in a stressful profession are contributing to doctor burnout, which our member survey shows as a common challenge. That's why Avant is committed to supporting doctors' mental wellbeing by providing resources on how to cope in stressful situations and how to build resilience.

Among our list of guest speakers to present at our events was former SAS major and regimental medical officer Dr Dan Pronk, who experienced the stress from over 100 combat missions, including four tours of Afghanistan. Dr Pronk presented on dealing with cumulative trauma and post-traumatic growth and was at the RACS ASM to sign his book, *The Resilience Shield*.

Over the last four years we have supported Avant member, Dr Geoff Toogood's Crazy Socks 4 Docs by raising awareness across our 82,000 members, and distributing 3,000 pairs of socks to doctors across the country. This initiative seeks to address doctors' wellbeing through encouraging open discussion by doctors and healthcare professionals on their mental health.

**3,000**   
pairs of socks distributed to support Crazy Socks 4 Docs

#### Delivering online insights

The Avant Learning Centre provides members with information on best practice for a multitude of situations in several formats to meet user needs. The resources are regularly updated, with our experts creating 23 new professional development resources in 2021-22. There were over 140,000 page views of our resource in the year. There was interest across many topics with the most frequently viewed items being:

- medical certificates and your responsibilities
- storing, retaining and disposing of medical records
- children and consent

- Request to attend an employment meeting
- how to end the doctor-patient relationship.



**Avant Learning Centre**  
avant.org.au/avant-learning-centre

#### Supporting the next generation

Avant continues to partner with onthewards to develop risk management content tailored for junior doctors. onthewards is a free, open access medical education website addressing a gap in formal education for medical students and junior doctors. It is run by junior doctors and dedicated to delivering practical, high-quality online resources.

Partnerships are in place with 22 university medical societies to support the next generation of doctors.

**22** 

sponsorship arrangements with university medical societies



Former SAS major and regimental medical officer, Dr Dan Pronk (3rd from right) presented at the Royal Australian College of Surgeons' Annual Scientific Meeting and meets the Avant team.

## Strategic partnerships





ASPS and Avant are both member-based organisations and we value the reciprocity that our relationship with Avant provides. Our members have access to excellent service and our society benefits from a range of information and resources.

**Dr Dan Kennedy**  
President - Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons 2020-2022

# Members informing your mutual

As a mutual, Avant exists to benefit its members. To help achieve this, we seek representation that reflects the range of roles and make-up of the membership. This ensures your interests are represented by Avant.

Having the perspectives of doctors across various backgrounds and specialties is essential to our understanding of what matters to members. This plays a large role in forming our operational activities and strategic goals.

Thank you to all members who have contributed this financial year through our advisory panels and committees, medical adviser roles within our business and the elected members on the Board.

## National Advocacy Stakeholder Committee

This committee provides strategic advice to inform and develop Avant's advocacy and education initiatives. We leverage members' close links to medical colleges and other key stakeholder organisations, to align our efforts to their activities for the benefit of the membership and profession.

In the past year, committee members have assisted us to keep up to date with developments at the front line during the pandemic. They have provided valuable input into the work of the advocacy and education team, and highlighted the key medico-legal issues for our members, including Medicare compliance and telehealth.

## State Medical Committees

To effectively protect members, it is essential to understand the medicine. The State Medical Committees discuss medical issues and highlight emerging risks Avant should be addressing to support members.

The committees are made up of highly respected doctors covering anaesthesia, emergency medicine, general practice, intensive care, obstetrics and gynaecology, oncology, orthopaedics, radiology and more.

## Scholarship and grant evaluation panels

The panels provide advice on Avant's scholarship and grant programs, input on assessing applications and selecting the recipients. The panels feature experienced medical researchers, members across a variety of specialties and practice managers.

## Doctor in Training Advisory Council

Trainees require specific support in their early careers, which is why the Doctor in Training Advisory Council (DiTAC) was established to advise on doctor-in-training related issues. In 2021-22, the 10 members' representatives met four times to discuss the impacts of COVID on training and early career doctors, as the environment has varied over the past few years, as well as updates in hospital, and the current challenges doctors face. They have also continued to contribute to the delivery of our scholarship program for trainees.

## Thank you to the panel members for your contributions in 2021-22\*

### 2021-22 Foundation and other grants Judging Panel

Dr Penny Browne  
Dr Patrick Clancy  
Dr Matthew Doane  
Dr Chris Go  
Dr Peter Henderson  
A/Prof Chris Milross  
Emeritus Professor Kim Oates AO  
Professor Grant Phelps  
Dr Amanda Smith  
Professor Simon Willcock

### 2021 Avant/AAPM Scholarship Program Judging Panel

Ms Jan Chaffey  
Ms Fiona Kolokas  
Ms Angela Mason  
Ms Colleen Sullivan

### 2021-22 Early Career Research Program Judging Panel

Professor Nadia Badawi  
Professor Amanda Barnard  
Dr Nicole Bart  
Professor Wendy Brown  
Dr Gareth Crouch  
Dr Matthew Doane  
Dr Sarah Dalton  
Dr Belinda Jackson  
Professor Ian Incoll  
Professor Gulam Khandaker  
Professor Jayashri Kulkarni AM  
Dr Jack Marjot  
Professor Jonathan Morris  
Emeritus Professor Kim Oates AO  
Professor Grant Phelps  
Dr Angelina di Re

## 2021-22 National Advocacy Stakeholder Committee

Dr Graeme Campbell  
A/Prof Anthony Cross  
Dr Bill Glasson  
Dr Annette Holian  
Dr Kym Jenkins  
A/Prof Julian Rait  
Dr Vijay Roach  
A/Prof Beverley Rowbotham  
A/Prof Rashmi Sharma  
Dr Michael Wright (Chair)

## 2021-22 Doctors in Training Advisory Committee

Dr Jessica Dean  
Dr Chris Go (Chair)  
Dr Jemma Hogan  
Dr James Kemper  
Dr Jack Marjot  
Dr Melissa Radjenovic  
Dr Laura Raiti  
Dr Deanne Soares  
Dr Ben Vialle  
Dr John Ward



I have enjoyed working with DiTAC members to advocate for DiTs in the healthcare system. It is inspiring to hear all the efforts and sacrifices DiTs have made during the pandemic to ensure patients received optimal care in the system.

Chris Go  
Chair, Doctor in Training Advisory Council

\*Accurate as of 30/6/2022

# Avant Mutual Board – elected members



**Dr Beverley Rowbotham AO**

MBBS (Hons 1), MD, FRACP, FRCPA, FAICD

It is always an honour to serve members as Chair of the Avant Mutual Group. We are now practising medicine in uncertain times, facing into another phase of the pandemic, global unrest and unstable economic conditions. It is for times like these that we have prepared. Avant is financially strong and focused on supporting members. We have worked to provide members with peace of mind through stable indemnity premiums, access to advice and through products and services that support doctors in their workplaces. We are using our strong voice to advocate for good sense and fair treatment of doctors who are working in new ways of practice amidst ongoing social change. This is what a member-owned organisation does. Avant aspires to be of the best use to its members and I am committed to delivering that.

*Chair of Avant Mutual Group Limited and Avant Group Holdings Limited, Director of Doctors' Health Fund, Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Insurance Limited, Professional Insurance Australia Pty Ltd, Chair of the Group Nominations Committee and the Doctors' Health Fund Remuneration Committee, Member of the Group Remuneration Committee, New Ventures Advisory Committee, the Doctors' Health Fund Risk Committee and the Doctors' Health Fund Audit Committee*



**Dr Jan Dudley OAM**

MBBS, FRANZCOG, GAICD

This year has continued to provide many challenges for Avant and its members, but I am proud of the way Avant has responded in supporting staff, members and the wider medical community. Avant has continued to provide guidance to help navigate a difficult medical and social environment and advocates strongly for its members. Avant is well placed to continue leadership in medical indemnity, with a very strong core business and 'doctors for doctors' ethos. Diversification of available products and member services continues, with ongoing member benefits from the loyalty reward and retirement reward programs. Despite difficult and volatile investment markets, Avant is able to continue to deliver on strategy, with members continuing to benefit from this success. All doctors, at various career stages, are supported and enabled to practise confidently, knowing Avant is their strong professional partner.

*Director of Avant Insurance Limited, Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Mutual Group Limited, Professional Insurance Australia Pty Ltd, Member of the Group Investment Committee, Group Audit Committee, and Group Risk Committee*



**Dr Gillian Farrell**

MBBS, FRACS

2022 has been another challenging year for Avant. COVID has again dominated the landscape in many ways and has had far reaching effects on all our lives. However, it appears that the end of the pandemic is in sight and we have learned a great deal over the last three years about the benefits of flexibility in the workplace. Avant and Doctors' Health Fund have continued to support their members and there have been some exciting developments including the creation of Avant Law which, will enhance members' experience. I am also pleased that Avant is developing its ESG policies and is very conscious of the necessity of reducing our carbon footprint.

*Director of the Doctors' Health Fund, Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Mutual Group Limited, Member of the Doctors' Health Fund Risk Committee, Doctors' Health Fund Audit Committee, and Doctors' Health Fund Remuneration Committee*



**Dr William Glasson AO**

MBBS (UQ), FRANZCO, FRACS, FRACGP, FRCOphth, DipAppSc (Opt), GAICD

Once again, it has been a challenging year for our members and our Managing Director, Natasha Fenech and her excellent team. COVID infections still remain a major issue amongst our community with everybody feeling the effects of staff shortages. We have also had difficult financial times with share market returns falling significantly, which has made our financial bottom line somewhat leaner. However, our focus has remained on our membership both from a financial and personal point of view. We are living in a world of change and we, Avant, are attempting to make your journey as smooth as possible. Thank you for your continuing support throughout the year.

*Director of Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Mutual Group Limited, Member of the Group Remuneration Committee and Group Nominations Committee*



**Dr Steven Hambleton**

MBBS, FAMA, FRACGP (Hons), FAICD

I am proud to represent you on the Board of Avant Mutual owned by us all, so much more than a medical indemnity insurer. We provide additional services that we all need to keep us, our business, and our health safe. We are supported by the largest medical indemnity law firm in Australia whose expertise is available to you 24 hours per day through our Medico-legal Advisory Service. We have now expanded the team of lawyers to help with your personal and business legal needs. Indemnity insurance is our core business but we can support and protect you through your whole career.

*Director of Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Mutual Group Limited, Member of the Group Investment Committee, Group Risk Committee, and Group Audit Committee*



**Dr Douglas Travis**

MBBS, FRACS, FAMA, GAICD

We are emerging from the other side of the pandemic and the challenge before us is complex. Like the rest of society, we are facing staffing challenges, group fatigue and the unsettling period of establishing a new post-COVID rhythm. The team at Avant has responded magnificently to these challenges and I am proud to be a small part of that team. As a Board, we are plotting the course ahead that includes reinvigorating Avant and keeping pace with the changing environment in which we find ourselves. The path ahead includes strengthening our current traditional businesses of medical indemnity and private health insurance while growing our new diverse service offerings for medical practitioners. This is an exciting time of change and I am proud to be part of that evolution.

*Director of Avant Group Holdings Limited, Avant Mutual Group Limited, Member of the Group Audit Committee and Group Risk Committee*

# Experts appointed to the Board



**Mr Peter Polson**

BCom, MBL, PMD

Mr Polson is a Director of AMGL, AGHL, and is the Chair of AIL and PIA. He has an extensive background in banking, insurance and financial services. He was formerly Managing Director of Colonial First State Investments, and with the Commonwealth Bank Group as Group Executive responsible for all investment and insurance services. Mr Polson is the Chair of IDP Education Limited, Challenger Limited, Challenger Life Company Limited and Very Special Kids. He is currently director of several entities in the Copia group.

*Chair of the New Ventures Advisory Committee and Group Investment Committee, Member of the Group Remuneration Committee and Group Nominations Committee*



**Mr Peter Beck**

BSc, FIA, FIAA, FSA, FASFA

Mr Beck is a Director of AMGL, AGHL, AIL and PIA. He is an actuary by profession and has over 40 years' experience in banking, insurance, superannuation and investments working in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, South Africa and the United Kingdom. He was formerly CEO of Pillar Administration, CEO of CommInsure, and Group General Manager, Strategic Development and Group Appointed Actuary at Colonial. Mr Beck is also a director of QInsure.

*Chair of the Doctors Health Fund Pty Ltd, and Chair of the Group Risk Committee, Group Audit Committee and Member of the Doctors' Health Fund Remuneration Committee, Group Investment Committee.*



**Mr Tony Bofinger**

BEc, MBA, FIAA, GAICD

Mr Bofinger is a Director of AIL, AGHL and Doctors' Health Fund. Mr Bofinger is an actuary with over 30 years' experience in life insurance, superannuation and investment, and he has expertise in risk management, capital management and finance. He is currently Chief Risk Officer of Challenger Limited, and was previously Appointed Actuary and Chief Financial Officer of Challenger Life Company Limited. Prior to that he held a range of executive positions in direct insurance, reinsurance and consulting. He is also the director of several Challenger Limited subsidiary companies.

*Member of the Group Audit Committee and Group Risk Committee, Chair of the Doctors' Health Fund Risk Committee and Chair of the Doctors' Health Fund Audit Committee, Member of the Doctors' Health Fund Remuneration Committee*



**Ms Lynda O'Grady**

BCom (Hons), FAICD

Mrs Lynda O'Grady is a Director of AGHL, AIL, and PIA. She has an extensive background in IT, telecommunications, media and health and aged care industries. She was formerly Executive Director and Chief of Product at Telstra Corporation and Commercial Director of the publishing division of PBL Ltd. She served as the inaugural chair of the Aged Care Financing Authority for six years. Mrs O'Grady is a non-executive director of Dominos Pizza Enterprises Ltd, Wagners Holdings Limited and Rubicon Water Ltd and serves on the Advisory Board of Jamieson Coote Bonds. Ms O'Grady was a Councillor on the Councils of Bond University and Southern Cross University at different times during the past decade.

*Member of the Group Audit Committee, Group Investment Committee and Group Risk Committee*



**Mr Duncan West**

ANZIIF (Snr Assoc.), CIP, FCII, BSc (Econ), GAICD

Mr West is a Director of AMGL, AGHL, PIA and AIL. He has over 35 years' experience in general and life insurance, including as CEO of Vero Insurance and CGU Insurance. Most recently he was Executive General Manager of Retail Wealth for NAB. Mr West holds a Graduate Diploma in Business, and a Bachelor of Science in Economics. He is a Senior Associate of the Australia and New Zealand Institute of Insurance and Finance and an honorary life member. Mr West is Chair of Habitat for Humanity Australia and Chair Elect of Challenger Group Limited, a Director of Suncorp Group Limited and Genworth Mortgage Insurance Limited.

*Chair of the Group Remuneration Committee and Member of the Group Risk Committee, Group Audit Committee, Nominations Committee, and New Ventures Advisory Committee*

# Executive Leadership Team



## Natasha Fenech

BEc, BSc, AIAA, MBA, GAICD

Avant Group CEO and Managing Director

I am solely focused on ensuring that we do our absolute best for our members and the membership as a whole. This is balanced between providing the high-quality service and advice our members expect, ensuring we continue to deliver value-adding products and services at a good price, while also enabling the long-term sustainability of the business. I'm especially proud of how the Avant team supported members throughout the year in the context of the pandemic environment.



## Peter Aroney

BComm, ACA

CEO, Doctors' Health Fund

My role is to ensure members are supported through quality health insurance, tailored to their requirements and professionally delivered. We are proud to continue to be one of the fastest growing health funds in Australia, with more doctors trusting us to protect their personal health needs. Our ongoing investment in leading technologies makes it easier for members to access our service in an increasingly complex industry.



## Pally Bargri

MPAF, MBA (Exec), Dip.FS, MAICD

Chief Risk Officer

Organisations face many risks and I am accountable for designing and implementing the risk management frameworks, policies and systems that are necessary to help manage the risks of today, while identifying the threats and opportunities of tomorrow. Throughout the year, we have continued to develop our risk maturity and capabilities, which will aid improvement in the quality of service delivered to members.



## Martin Edwards

BSc, FIAA, GAICD

CEO, Technology in Practice

My team is responsible for identifying and developing new technology solutions that support the efficient delivery of good healthcare. Our vision includes delivering greater value for members through expanding the services available on our platforms. We strive to continue to support practice employees to get the most from our technologies, in order to manage their practices most efficiently.



## Patrick Esplin

BSc, LLB

CEO, Avant Law

Leading the newly expanded Avant Law, our doctor-focused law firm, my focus is on ensuring the delivery of high-quality legal services meets members' personal, professional and business needs. I also have responsibility for overseeing the group governance at Avant, including the annual general meeting and member elections.



## Jeffery Eberwein

MBA, MSBA, MSEE, BSEE

Chief Information Officer

As CIO, my focus is to help Avant better service our members and colleagues, by improving business performance through the use of enabling technologies. The four key objectives behind this are to provide a more proactive service provision to our businesses, build on the existing trust with our members and colleagues, and improve our ability to manage risk and ensure the security of our members' information.



**Michael Loughman**

BBA  
CEO, Financial Services

I lead a team of passionate individuals focused on delivering high-quality, doctor-centric financial services. Our purpose is to help doctors gain peace of mind through financial security and freedom of choice. We aim to be recognised as the leading specialist provider of financial services to doctors, offering a full suite of personal insurance solutions and lending solutions covering all life and business needs.



**Tim Tez**

BCom, MBA  
CEO, Medical Indemnity

My role at Avant is to ensure we provide the best possible advice and support to our members so they can continue serving the community. By providing member-centric services and products, we aim to be the most trusted professional partner in supporting doctors throughout their lives and careers. My focus is on delivering the best possible value and balancing affordable premiums with quality services to give members confidence in the support they receive from us.



**Daniel Vanderkemp**

BAcc, ACA  
Group Chief Financial Officer

As the Chief Financial Officer for the Avant group, I have responsibility to maintain the financial strength and security of the organisation, never forgetting our responsibilities to our member owners. The team has a broad range of functions that includes financial reporting, internal audit, actuarial, procurement and investments. I also have the responsibility of ensuring compliance with significant regulations that apply to each of these areas.



**Julie Webster**

BCom, MBus, GAICD  
Chief Customer and Data Officer

Leading the newly established group customer solutions division, I am accountable for how Avant presents itself to members and the broader medical community. This includes developing a deep understanding of doctors' needs through their careers and lives so that our product and services are aligned and effectively articulated. We are increasing investment in the development of our data management systems and governance to allow for more refined communication with members.



**Rachael Williams**

BBus, MLLR  
Chief People Officer

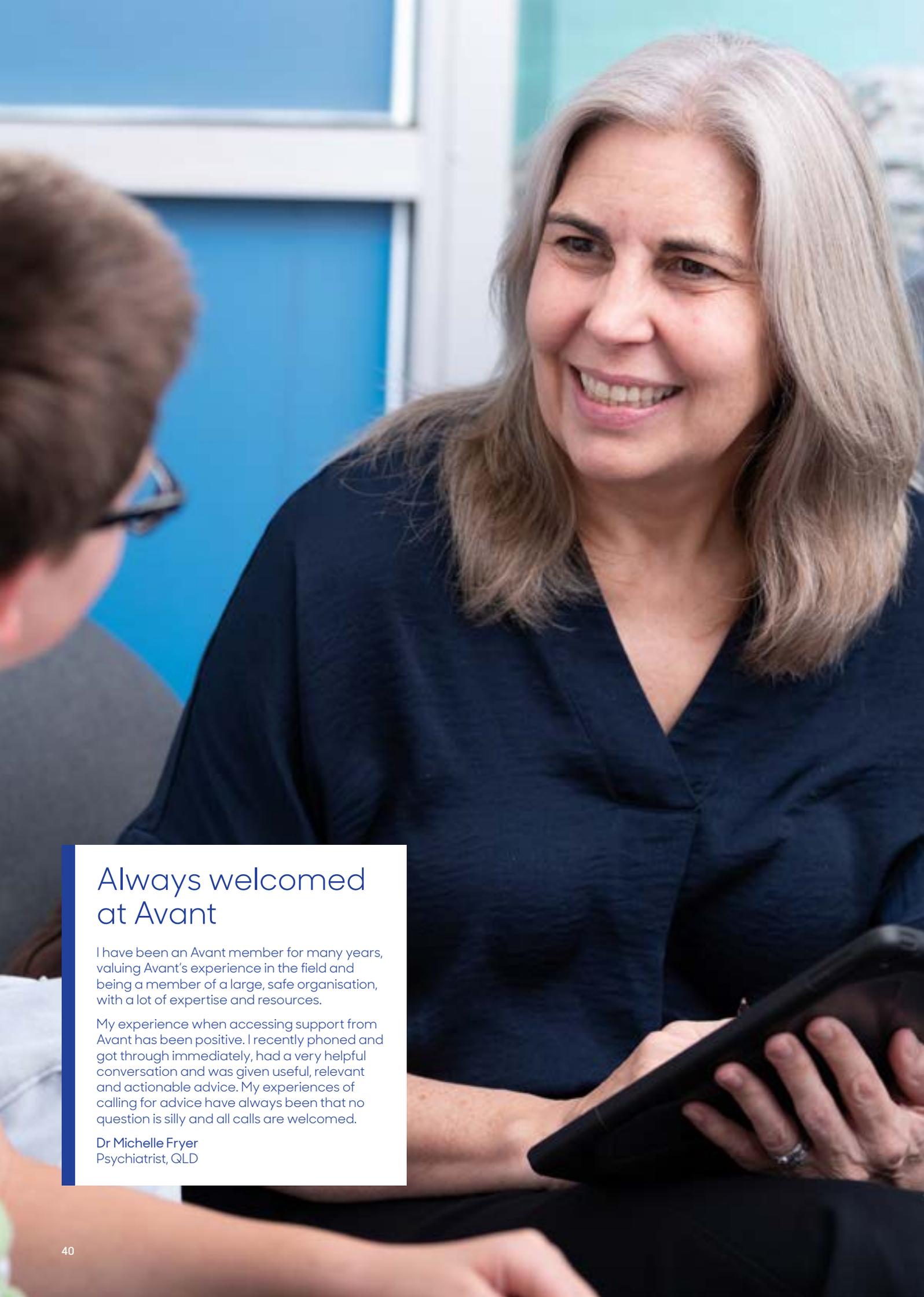
In People & Culture, our focus is on supporting every business unit to perform their role, so they can deliver and provide the support our members need. My role at Avant includes leading a team that works across the entire organisation. Made up of business partners, talent acquisition specialists, learning and development, and communications managers, the People & Culture team provides extensive support to all quarters of the Avant business.



**Dr Michael Wright**

MBBS, MSc, PhD, FRACGP, GAICD  
Chief Medical Officer

As a practising doctor, my role is to bring the member voice to the executive team and lead the Advocacy, Education and Research unit. We advocate for effective medical indemnity and regulatory environments, doctor wellbeing and safer patient outcomes, while representing the interests of both our members and the medical profession. I am proud that our team has continued to provide support and advocate for our members through the COVID pandemic.



## Always welcomed at Avant

I have been an Avant member for many years, valuing Avant's experience in the field and being a member of a large, safe organisation, with a lot of expertise and resources.

My experience when accessing support from Avant has been positive. I recently phoned and got through immediately, had a very helpful conversation and was given useful, relevant and actionable advice. My experiences of calling for advice have always been that no question is silly and all calls are welcomed.

**Dr Michelle Fryer**  
Psychiatrist, QLD

**IMPORTANT:** Any cover or product benefits mentioned in this Annual Report are subject to the full terms, conditions and exclusions of the relevant policy and/or Product Disclosure Statement (PDS).

Professional indemnity insurance products are issued by Avant Insurance Limited, ABN 82 003 707 471, AFSL 238 765 (Avant Insurance). Please read the relevant PDS or policy wording, available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) before deciding whether to acquire, or continue to hold the product.

Avant Insurance arranges Avant Business Insurance as agent of the insurer Allianz Australia Insurance Limited ABN 15 000 122 850, AFSL 234 708.

Avant Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance is issued by Avant Insurance. The policy wording is available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) or by contacting us on 1800 128 268. Practices need to consider other forms of insurance including directors' and officers' liability, public and products liability, property and business interruption insurance, and workers compensation. Avant Cyber Insurance cover is available to eligible Avant Practice Medical Indemnity Insurance policy holders up to the cessation of their policy and is provided under a group policy between Liberty Mutual Insurance Company ABN 61 086 083 605 and Avant Insurance.

Avant Insurance arranges Avant Business Insurance as agent of the insurer Allianz Australia Insurance Limited ABN 15 000 122 850, AFSL 234 708 and may receive a commission on each policy arranged.

Avant Travel Cover is available under a Group Policy between QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited (ABN 78 003 191 035, AFSL 239545) and Avant Mutual Group Limited (ABN 58 123 154 898) (Avant Mutual). Avant Travel Cover is underwritten by QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited ABN 78 003 191 035 AFSL 239545. For full details including the restrictions, terms, conditions and exclusions that apply, please read and consider the PDS, available at [avant.org.au](http://avant.org.au) or by calling us on 1800 128 268. An excess may apply, depending on policy and claim type.

Private health insurance products are issued by The Doctors' Health Fund Pty Ltd ABN 68 001 417 527 (Doctors' Health Fund), a member of the Avant Mutual Group. Cover is subject to the terms and conditions (including waiting periods, limitations and exclusions) of the individual policy, available at [doctorshealthfund.com.au/our-cover](http://doctorshealthfund.com.au/our-cover).

The LIST is provided by Avant Life Insurance. "Avant Life Insurance" is a registered business name of Doctors Financial Services Pty Ltd ABN 56 610 510 328 AFS Licence Number 487758. Refer to [avant.org.au/life](http://avant.org.au/life) for important information.

Kooyong Group is a trademark of KA JV Pty Ltd (ACN 637769361) exclusively licensed to KA JV 2 Pty Ltd (ABN 75640406784), Credit Representative Number 523242. KA JV 2 Pty Ltd is an authorised credit representative for Australian Finance Group Ltd (ABN 11066385822), Australian Credit Licence Number 389087. Credit services or assistance to which the National Credit Code applies are provided by KA JV 2 Pty Ltd (a wholly owned subsidiary of KA JV Pty Ltd).

The Avant Foundation (ABN 27 179 743 817) is administered by its trustee, Avant Foundation Limited (ACN 618 393 847). The Avant Foundation is a Public Ancillary Fund, endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient.

Not all Avant members are eligible for a LRP reward. Members not eligible include medical students, interns, RMOs and DITs and members who have their professional indemnity policy purchased on their behalf under a corporate group arrangement. However, membership years as an intern, RMO or DIT will be included in tenure calculations. The provision of any LRP reward is not guaranteed and will be determined by Avant's Board's annual assessment of the quality of Avant's financial performance.

The Retirement Reward Plan reflects the current policy of the Board for determining which members of Avant are eligible to participate in the Retirement Reward Plan and any Retirement Reward Dividends declared by Avant. The Retirement Reward Plan is entirely at the discretion of the Board and no member will be eligible to receive a Retirement Reward Dividend until such time as the Board declares a dividend in favour of that member. The Retirement Reward Plan is subject to change, suspension or termination by the Board at any time. The current eligibility criteria and allocation rules are available at [avant.org.au/arrp](http://avant.org.au/arrp).

The GSIPP discounts do not apply to previous or existing members of the Getting Started in Private Practice scheme and only apply from the first year a member becomes eligible and subject to eligibility rules. For eligibility rules and full details, please read the Getting Started in Private Practice Member Eligibility Rules at [avant.org.au/new-private-practice](http://avant.org.au/new-private-practice) or by contacting us on 1800 128 268.

Any advice in this publication is general advice only and does not take into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. You should consider whether the product is appropriate for you and the PDS and/or policy wording for the relevant product before taking any action. Information is only current at the date initially published. © Avant Mutual Group Limited 2022.



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