



Private Healthcare Australia
Better Cover. Better Access. Better Care.



Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Act

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About Private Healthcare Australia

Private Healthcare Australia (PHA) is the Australian private health insurance industry's peak representative body. We have over 20 registered health funds throughout Australia as members and collectively represent 98% of people covered by private health insurance. PHA member funds provide healthcare benefits for more than 14 million Australians.

Response

PHA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023*.

Private health insurers have a strong vested interest in ensuring that quality standards are firmly in place for any medical practitioner offering medical procedures. We support the highest possible standard of care, where training and standards are accepted and accredited independently by the Australian Medical Council.

In the interests of patient safety, it is necessary to address public confusion regarding the qualifications and training of practitioners performing surgery and ensuring patients are not misled.

The community's confusion around qualifications means that health funds are often criticised for not covering the costs of procedures that are medically unnecessary provided by people calling themselves surgeons. It can be difficult for funds to explain the difference between an accredited surgeon with a qualification recognised by the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency and a person self-nominating as a surgeon.

This confusion is compounded where it is difficult for consumers to distinguish between medically necessary surgery covered by Medicare and other procedures that are considered medically unnecessary (which cannot lawfully be funded by private health insurance). Consumers can be misled regarding the role of their insurance cover, which places additional financial burden on individuals to cover the full medical costs of medically unnecessary surgical procedures.

Further, private health insurers are often called upon to fund medical procedures provided by accredited surgeons to fix issues caused by inappropriate surgery provided by poorly trained medical practitioners. This increases premiums for all policy holders. Funding corrective medical procedures and surgical complications that can be caused by doctors who are not appropriately credentialed, puts additional pressure on health system costs including PHI premiums.

For this reason, PHA supports title protection for health practitioners using the title surgeon. The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023* is supported; however, it is unclear why the Bill is only limiting title protection to medical practitioners.

As the Bill's explanatory material notes, "The diversity of qualifications and experience of those calling themselves 'surgeons' has caused confusion for health care consumers, who reasonably assume all practitioners using the title have comparable qualifications with an appropriate level of advanced surgical training."

We ask that the Parliament consider extending the title protection for "surgeon" to all registered health professions covered by the National Law.