



Patient Safety must be the Priority

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's Atlas of Healthcare Variation is an important reminder to all healthcare practitioners that appropriate care and patient safety should always be the priority, according to Private Healthcare Australia Chief Executive Dr Rachel David.

Dr David said that while Australian consumers generally had good access to quality health care, it was concerning that the third Atlas highlighted significant variations in some areas of health according to where people lived, particularly in obstetrics where in some locations one in five planned births were before 37 weeks.

"The high incidence of early planned caesarean sections that are not medically necessary pose risks to mother and baby. The Atlas also identified that young Australians are at risk of serious long-term adverse effects as a result of overuse of antibiotics.

"The Atlas found overuse of gastroscopy and colonoscopy with variations of up to seven-fold between local areas in Australia, the rate of neck ultrasound varies up to six-fold, and overuse of anti-psychotic medication being prescribed by GPs to people aged over 65 years is a major concern.

"While patient safety should always be the priority, eliminating unnecessary care would have a significant impact on healthcare costs in Australia and if improving affordability is a by-product of focusing on quality and safety, then it is a win-win for all Australians.

"Health funds want to ensure their members are getting value for money and to reassure them their premiums are not being spent on low value or unnecessary treatment. The more low-value tests and treatments that are eliminated, the easier it will be to keep downward pressure on premiums and invest members' funds in procedures that are necessary.

"The ACQSHC Atlas is a valuable document and will make an important contribution to improving quality and safety in health care for all Australians," said Dr David.

Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's private health insurance industry. PHA represents 20 Australian health funds with a combined membership of 12.9 million Australians, or 96% of the sector on membership. Promoting the value of private health insurance to consumers in the Australian economy and keeping premiums affordable for our members is the number one priority of PHA members. PHA's CEO Dr Rachel David is available for interview.

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