

MEDIA RELEASE

Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges

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Medical colleges unite to improve specialist access and affordability for all

All 16 specialist medical colleges unite behind a shared Professionalism Framework on ethical billing, fee transparency and informed financial consent.

CANBERRA, 5 March 2026 – At a time when Australians are increasingly concerned about access to specialist care, including out-of-pocket costs and unexpected bills, Australia’s 16 specialist medical colleges have come together on a combined national framework on ethical billing and patient protection.

The Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) launched its national Professionalism Framework on ethical billing and fee transparency at Parliament House today.

The Framework was launched by CPMC Chair Associate Professor Kerin Fielding and the Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, the Hon. Rebecca White MP.

The framework establishes shared expectations for ethical billing, fee transparency, and informed financial consent – reinforcing the medical profession’s commitment to patient-centred care.

It sets out clear principles: plain-language disclosure of all costs; genuine informed financial consent as a prerequisite to treatment; and compassionate billing that accounts for patients' circumstances. It also establishes an explicit expectation that specialists consistently uphold these principles in their practice.

“Patients deserve clear information about the cost of their care and the confidence that billing practices are fair, transparent and respectful,” said CPMC Chair Associate Professor Kerin Fielding.

“This framework reinforces that informed financial consent is not complete unless patients have had a genuine opportunity to understand the financial implications of their care, including available alternatives.”

The framework makes clear that patients are entitled to clear, upfront information about the cost of their care, while billing practices that exploit vulnerabilities, obscure costs, or include undisclosed fees are inconsistent with professional standards and should not form part of contemporary specialist practice.

While specialist medical colleges do not set or regulate fees, CPMC said the profession has a responsibility to uphold transparency in billing practices so that patients can make informed decisions about their care.

CPMC has committed to working with the Commonwealth to ensure the Medical Costs Finder website delivers better transparency for patients seeking specialist medical care.

The colleges will continue to work constructively with government, insurers and consumer representatives to improve access to specialist care and reduce financial barriers for patients, so

that every Australian can access affordable, high-quality specialist care without risking financial hardship.

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Media contact: CPMC Media - 0474 473 493

Interview: CPMC chair Associate Professor Kerin Fielding is available for interview. A/Prof Fielding is the first woman surgeon to serve as CPMC chair and brings more than 30 years of lived experience as a rural specialist.

QUOTE BANK

Associate Professor Kerin Fielding, Chair, CPMC

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On the Framework

“Every Australian should be able to access affordable, high-quality specialist care without risking financial hardship. This Framework is the medical profession speaking with one voice about what it expects of its members.”

On enforcement

“We’re not here to make excuses. Where practitioners break the law – failing to get proper financial consent, misleading patients on costs, illegal billing – we support enforcement, full stop.”

On affordability and supply

“Fees alone will not fix affordability and access, we need multi-lever reform. We need investment in public outpatient services, expanded specialist training, national workforce planning, and Medicare rebates that reflect modern care. When a family in regional Australia can’t see a specialist, it’s not because the fee is too high – it’s because the specialist is not there. We need to fix the supply problem at the same time.”

On the Medical Costs Finder

“We encourage transparency with the Medical Costs Finder. We’re putting our hand up to work with Government to make it genuinely useful – not just a tick-the-box exercise.”

On working with Government

“Transparency and professional standards matter, and that’s what the Framework delivers. Distributing specialists to where they are needed requires an increased investment in funded training positions located in areas of need. The colleges are ready to work with Government on both fronts – accountability and access to ensure all Australians have access to affordable high quality specialist care.”