



Australian Government

Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing

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Specialist Affordability Working Group

Communiqué - 20 August 2026

First Meeting

The Specialist Affordability Working Group (Working Group) held its first meeting on Thursday 20 August 2026.

The Working Group has been established to provide advice to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing on practical reforms to improve access to affordable specialist health services. It brings together representatives from consumer organisations, health providers, health policy and health economics. Its work is being undertaken alongside broader consultation processes, including public consultation activities and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability's inquiry into access and affordability of medical specialists.

The Working Group's inaugural meeting focused on two initial reform priorities: modernising referral processes and improving informed financial consent and fee transparency. Departmental officers provided an overview of consultation findings and potential reform options to support discussion.

In discussing referral processes, members considered opportunities to improve consumer understanding of referral pathways and access to referral information, reduce unnecessary administrative burden, support continuity of care and strengthen patient choice. Members discussed referral validity periods, billing arrangements for initial specialist attendances and options to support patients seeking second opinions or changing practitioners. A range of perspectives were shared on the potential benefits, risks and implementation considerations associated with reform.

Members also discussed informed financial consent and fee transparency, including the information patients should receive about potential costs, the timing of cost disclosure and opportunities to improve consistency across the health system. Discussion considered the role of education, guidance and regulatory approaches in supporting compliance with informed financial consent expectations, as well as issues associated with multiple provider fees and split billing arrangements.

The next meeting of the Specialist Affordability Working Group was held on 8 October 2026. It included discussion of options relating to excessive specialist fees and further consideration of referral and informed financial consent reforms. A communiqué outlining the topics discussed at the second meeting in further detail will be published in due course.