

ICAC recommends stronger governance of professional development funds for medical officers

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has today published eight recommendations to strengthen governance, improve oversight, and reduce corruption risks in the management of professional development funds for medical officers in South Australia's public health system.

It follows a six-month evaluation of the policies and practices of the Department for Health and Wellbeing, the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network (SALHN) and the Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN).

SA Health spent \$64 million on professional development reimbursements for public sector medical officers from April 2025 - April 2026. In line with their respective enterprise agreements, interns, medical practitioners and registrars are entitled to be reimbursed for professional development expenses up to \$10,000 per annum, while consultants can claim up to \$23,000 per annum.

ICAC Commissioner Emma Townsend said that the evaluation revealed a broad interpretation of what constitutes 'professional development', and a need for more clarity around what reimbursements are appropriate.

"There is no doubt that the lack of clarity has contributed to the wide range of claims identified during the evaluation, including examples that, on the surface, appear to blur the line between professional and personal benefit," she said.

Examples of claims uncovered through the evaluation include:

- \$1,200 for three gold-plated stationery items
- \$7,340 for a workbag
- \$3,400 in accommodation in Disneyland for five nights for four guests
- \$68,600 over four years for four apple watches, five tablets/iPads, four mobile phones and four laptops (claimed by a single medical officer)
- \$12,000 in accommodation to attend a wellness retreat in Bail for four nights.

Commissioner Townsend acknowledged the vital role medical officers play in providing safe, high-quality care for the community at all stages of their lives, and the importance of professional development.

“Ongoing professional development is critical to maintaining high standards of patient care, supporting workforce capability, and ensuring practitioners keep pace with evolving clinical knowledge and practice,” she said.

“However, with significant public investment comes a responsibility to ensure those funds are used for their intended purpose and deliver value to the public health system and the community.”

ICAC’s recommendations centre on clarifying what constitutes professional development and strengthening the claims approval process.

“For instance, we are urging greater clarity for medical officers about how often they can claim for devices like watches, laptops and mobile phones, and better guidance about appropriate travel expenditure,” Commissioner Townsend said.

The Commissioner said the issues identified were unlikely to be confined to the health sector alone.

“The risks identified through this evaluation are not unique to health. Similar risks can arise wherever there is discretion in how public funds are used.”

“Public authorities should ensure they have clear guidance, appropriate controls and effective oversight mechanisms in place to reduce ambiguity and support the proper use of public funds.”

Commissioner Townsend acknowledged the cooperation of the Department for Health and Wellbeing, SALHN and WCHN and their staff throughout the evaluation.

“There was a real willingness among officers at all levels to share information, reflect on current practices and identify opportunities for strengthening controls, and we thank them for their positive engagement with us,” she said.

Evaluation of Professional Development Funds for Medical Officers is available on the [ICAC website](#).