

# UNDERSTANDING THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL SYSTEM

- **Interpreters**
- **Medicare**
- **Concession cards**
- **Going to the doctor**
- **Getting your medicines**
- **Specialists**




The Australian medical system is complex. If you or your family are sick, it can be difficult to know where to go for help and how much it will cost. This information will help you understand a bit more about the medical system in Australia.

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#### **NOTE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN VICTORIA:**

You can receive free medical treatment at hospital emergency departments. Other medical services depend on which visa you hold. Your access to services can change over time, so please check with your case worker to find out what you can access.

## Interpreters

 An interpreter is a person who helps you talk with people who speak a different language.

**In Australia, interpreters are professionals who have studied to receive their qualification. If you communicate through an interpreter you can expect your conversation to be accurate and remain confidential.**

If you can't find a doctor who speaks your language, you can call the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) for FREE** on **131 450** to access an interpreter. This service can also help you make a medical appointment.

Many people in Australia use interpreting services to communicate with people in the health system.

The interpreter will **NOT** give your information to anybody else. **It is a free service.**

## Medicare card

if you have a Medicare card, you can access free or low-cost medical services like:

- free or low-cost treatment at the doctor
- free or low-cost X-rays and blood tests
- free treatment at public hospitals

If you are going to a health service, always bring your medicare card with you.

Medicare **DOES NOT** pay for:

- ambulance costs
- most dental services
- glasses
- staying in a private hospital
- and some other health services  
(if you have questions, ask your GP)

Some asylum seekers have access to Medicare, depending on their visa conditions. For more information, contact the Victorian Refugee Health Network.

## Concession and health care cards

**Concession and health care cards can get you cheaper health services.**

If you can get a Health Care Card or a Pensioner Concession Card, you will pay less when you use some health services.

For example:

- You can get some medicines cheaper
- You can get cheap dental care at a public dental service

To get cheap or free services, always bring your concession card with you, and show it when you use health services.



Medicare card



Health Care card



Pensioner Concession card

## Going to the doctor

Family doctors in Australia are called General Practitioners (GPs). Some doctors work in health centres and hospitals and some work in their own offices.

You can make an appointment with a doctor yourself if you are sick or feeling unwell. You can also see a doctor even if you feel healthy but want a health check to make sure you don't have any health problems. A doctor can also tell you if you need vaccinations or immunisations to protect you from some illnesses.

You can choose a male or a female doctor.

You can change your doctor at any time. If you change, give your new doctor a list of medicines you take and a copy of your medical records.

If you are unwell and need a doctor at night, on weekends and public holidays you can use one of these free medical services.

### For help on the phone:

- Nurse on call on **1300 60 60 24** (in Victoria)
- After Hours GP helpline on **1800 022 222**

### If you need a doctor to visit you at home:

- The Home Doctor on **13 74 25** (in Victoria)

## Paying for the doctor

Different doctors cost different amounts of money. Some doctors may '**bulk bill**'. Bulk billing means the service is free if you have a Medicare card.

Ask if the doctor bulk bills when you make an appointment.

If the doctor does not bulk bill, you will need to pay for your treatment. You may be able to get some of the money back from Medicare. Keep all the receipts from the health service, because you will need these to get money back.

Call Medicare on **132 011** to ask how to get money back after seeing a doctor.



## Booking a doctor's appointment

You need to book an appointment for most health services. You can use this guide to help you book an appointment on the phone or when visiting the health service.

### Booking an appointment:

When you make a doctor's appointment, you might need to give:

- your name
- your date of birth
- which doctor you want to see
- the day and time you want to see the doctor

### When you make a doctor's appointment, you can ask:

- if the doctor offers bulk billing
- to have an interpreter if you need one

When you book an appointment with a doctor in Australia, it is important to arrive on time.



## Going to a specialist

Specialists are doctors that have special skills in a certain area of medicine, for example, heart doctors (cardiologists) and skin doctors (dermatologists). In Australia you need a referral from your doctor to make an appointment with a specialist.

A referral letter tells the specialist about your health problem. If your doctor wants you to see a public hospital specialist, they will ask for an appointment for you. The date of your appointment depends on your health problem.

If your doctor wants you to see a private specialist, you will need to phone the specialist yourself to make an appointment.

## Medicine, pharmacies and chemists

In Australia, the place you buy medicines or other health products is called a pharmacy or 'chemist'. At the pharmacy you can also ask for free advice about injuries, illness and sickness that do not need urgent attention.

If your doctor wants you to take medicine, they will give you a prescription or 'script'. You need to give this script to the people at the pharmacy to get your medicine.

In Australia, the government pays some of the cost of many prescription medicines to make sure people get the medicines they need. You need to take your medicare card to the pharmacy to get this discount.

If you have a Centrelink Concession Card or Pension Card, take this too. It will make your medicines even cheaper.

For many medicines, you don't need a prescription. You can buy medicines for minor health problems like a headache or a cold, without a prescription at the pharmacy. These are called 'over the counter' medicines.



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