

UNDERSTANDING THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL SYSTEM



The Australian medical system is a complex one. If you or your family are sick, sometimes it can be difficult to know which health service to use, when you can use it and how much it will cost. This information is an introduction to help you understand a bit more about the medical system in Australia.

Please note that if you are an asylum seeker in Victoria you will receive free medical treatment at the emergency department. Other medical service entitlements depend on which visa you are on. They often change over time, so we encourage you to check with your case worker to find out what is current.

Interpreter



An interpreter is a person who speaks two or more languages and helps you talk with people who speak a different language.

In Australia interpreters must be certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Interpreters and Translators (NAATI).

If you cannot find a doctor who speaks your language, you can call the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on **131 450** for an interpreter. They can also help you make a medical appointment.

You should not feel embarrassed or worried to ask for an interpreter.

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

Medicare card

Medicare card holders can access free or low-cost medical services.

If you have a Medicare card, it means you can access:

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

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)

You should always bring your Medicare card with you, and show it when you use health services.

Centrelink concession cards

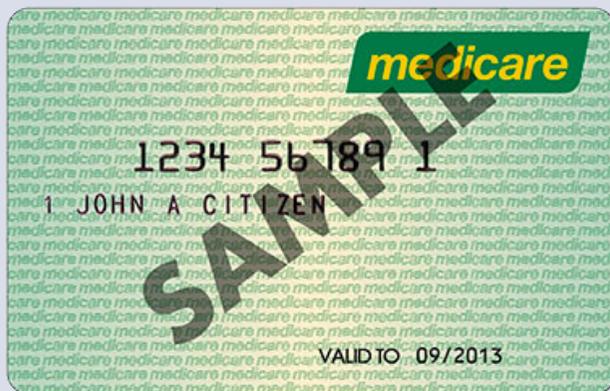
Centrelink is a government program that provides different social or welfare services and payments.

Some people can get a Health Care Card or a Pensioner Concession Card. These cards mean you pay less when you use some health services.

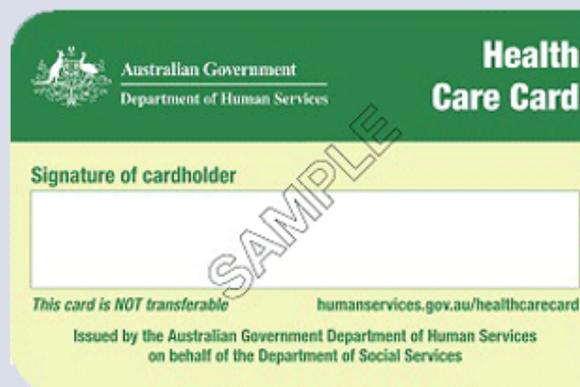
For example:

- Some medicines prescribed by your doctor will be cheaper
- Low-cost treatment at a public dental service

If you have a concession card, always bring it 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 also called General Practitioners (GP). Some doctors work in health centres and hospitals and some work in their own offices.

You can make your own appointment with the doctor when you are sick or feeling unwell. You can see a doctor even if you feel healthy but want a health check-up 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 choose to change your doctor at any time. If you want to go to a different doctor you should give your new doctor a list of medicines you are taking and a copy of your medical records.

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

For telephone advice:

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

To ask for a doctor to visit you at home:

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



Paying for the doctor

Different doctors charge different amounts of money. Some doctors may “bulk bill” if you have a Medicare card.

Bulk billing means the service is free for you because the doctor will receive money straight from Medicare for the appointment with you. You can ask if the doctor bulk bills when you make an appointment.

If the doctor does not bulk bill, you will be asked to pay for your treatment. You may be able to get some of the costs 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 appointment

An appointment means agreeing to meet someone, like a doctor, at a certain time and place. In Australia it is important to make an appointment and then arrive on time to your 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 call to make a doctor appointment you will probably be asked to provide some or all this information.

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

When making a doctor appointment you can ask:

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

To help you arrive on time on the day of your appointment, write down the time and date of your appointment in your diary, calendar or mobile phone.



Going to a specialist

Specialists are doctors that have done extra training in a certain area of medicine like the heart doctor (cardiologist) or the skin doctor (dermatologist). In Australia you need a referral from your doctor to make an appointment with a specialist.

A referral is a letter from your doctor to the specialist about your health problems. If your doctor refers you to a public hospital specialist, they will send the specialist a referral letter to ask for an appointment for you. The date of your appointment depends on your health problem.

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

Medicine and pharmacies (chemists)

A pharmacy, also called a 'chemist', is a place where you can buy medicines and other health products. At the pharmacy you can also ask for free advice about minor injuries and illness.

If your doctor wants you to have certain medicines, they will give you a piece of paper called a "prescription". This paper tells the pharmacist what medicine you need, how often and when you should take the medicine. There are some medicines you can only buy with a prescription.

Take the prescription to a pharmacy with your Medicare card and Centrelink Health Care card if you have one. The Centrelink Health Care card will mean that you pay a cheaper price for the medication.

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.

In Australia the government pays some of the cost of many prescription medicines as they see this as an important way to make sure people can get the medicines they need.



We would like to acknowledge the document 'Using health services in the ACT' produced by the ACT government which helped inform this resource.