

# 2. Seeing a doctor

## General practitioners

- in Australia most people go to a family doctor when they have a health problem or need a health check-up. Family doctors are also known as 'general practitioners' (GP)
- family doctors look after your general physical and emotional health and they are the first person most people go to for a health problem, unless it is an emergency
- family doctors will determine if you need any tests, need to see a specialist, go to a hospital, or whether they can treat your health problem directly
- family doctors work from small offices or clinics called 'medical centres' or 'surgeries'. Most of these are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday but some are open longer hours and on weekends. There are very few open 24 hours per day
- you are free to choose your own family doctor. It is important that you are happy with your family doctor. If not, you are free to choose another one
- it is a good idea to ask friends, family members or people in your community for a recommendation of a family doctor who knows how to use interpreters or who speaks your language. Alternatively, look in the Yellow Pages telephone directory under 'medical practitioners'.

## Appointments

- make an appointment in advance
- appointments are usually short (10- 15 minutes) but you can request a longer appointment if needed when making the appointment
- if you do not make an appointment, you may be asked to leave or have to wait a very long time
- each appointment is for one person only
- if you cannot attend the appointment, you should call your doctor and cancel it
- you can get the most benefit from your visit to your doctor by writing down what you want to consult the doctor about and bringing it with you
- tell the doctor all the medicines that you are using including traditional remedies, vitamins, herbs, etc.
- bring all your current medicines to show to your doctor.

## Paying the doctor

- some doctors 'bulk bill' their patients. This means your visit to the family doctor is free because the Federal Government pays the doctor directly through Medicare
- if your family doctor does not bulk bill, you pay the doctor and then claim some of the money back from Medicare with your receipt. This means you only have to pay the difference
- you can only be bulk billed or claim money back from Medicare if you have a Medicare card. For information about how to obtain a Medicare card, eligibility and fee schedules, call 13 20 11 or visit the Medicare website: [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)



## Interpreters – Doctors Priority Line

- family and private specialist doctors are able to use free interpreters 7 days per week 24 hours per day to better communicate with you
- the doctor can ring the Doctors Priority Line on **1300 131 450** to get a phone interpreter or book an onsite interpreter for you. You should request an interpreter when making the appointment to make this an easy process.

This factsheet is part of a series of 10. The complete set comprises:

1. Health system in Queensland
2. Seeing a doctor
3. Medicines
4. Queensland hospitals
5. Community health centres
6. Dental services
7. Allied health
8. Staying healthy and preventing illness
9. Health and support services for specific groups
10. You and the health service system

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### Specialist doctors

- your family doctor may want you to see a specialist doctor if you need more tests or treatment. Specialists are doctors who have had more training in particular health problems
- specialists are generally seen with a referral letter from a family doctor. You can see a specialist directly. However, you will receive a much smaller Medicare rebate without a referral
- specialist fees are usually more than family doctor fees. Most specialists do not bulk bill. It is important to check what fees will be charged
- your family doctor can also refer you to a specialist in a public hospital. You may have to wait some time to get an appointment. Specialist doctors in public hospitals outpatients clinics are free. Specialist doctors also work in private practice clinics in public hospitals.

### Medicines

- your family doctor and/or specialist may give you a prescription for medicine. You should take the prescription to a chemist/pharmacy
- you should take your Medicare card, Health Care Card or Pension Concession Card to the chemist/ pharmacy if you have these. Call Centrelink Multilingual 131 202 line for information about eligibility for these cards
- you will be required to pay for your medicine but most medicines cost less for people with these cards
- for further information see *Fact Sheet 3 – “Medicines”*.

Specialist doctor	Focuses on
Allergist/Immunologist	immune system eg. allergies, asthma
Cardiologist	heart
Dermatologist	skin disease
Endocrinologist	glands and hormones eg. diabetes
Gastroenterology	stomach, intestines, digestion
Geriatrician	old people
Gynaecologist	female genital organs
Haematologist	blood
Hepatologist	liver
Infectious Disease Physician	sickness that can be spread from person to person eg. Measles, HIV
Medical Oncologist	cancer treatment
Nephrologist	kidneys
Neurologist	brain
Occupational Physician	work injuries/illness
Ophthalmologist	eyes vision
Orthopaedist	bones, muscles, joints
Otolaryngologist/ENT Physician	ears, nose and throat
Paediatrician	children
Pathologist	cells and body tissue to identify disease/sickness
Pharmacologist	effects of medicine/drugs on people's bodies
Palliative Medicine Physician	reduce suffering and prolonging life during illness and death
Psychiatrist	mental illness
Obstetrician	delivering babies
Radiologist	creating and interpreting pictures of areas inside the body eg. x rays
Rheumatologist	muscles and skeleton eg. arthritis
Surgeon	operations
Thoracic Medicine	chest, breathing
Urologist	urinary tract, including kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra