

Hospital and Health Services access for people seeking asylum

1. Purpose

This information sheet provides guidance on the responsibilities of Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) in the provision of healthcare to people residing in Queensland who are seeking asylum. This content applies to people designated by the Commonwealth Government as asylum seekers who live freely in community and to asylum seekers who are in closed or community detention.

This information sheet supports the implementation of the [Fees and Charges for Health Care Services Health Service Directive](#) (QH-HSD-045:2016).

2. Key information

- On 29 July 2017, the Queensland Government announced that it would provide Medicare ineligible asylum seekers with access to public health services at no charge. That is, no costs should be directly charged to a Medicare ineligible asylum seeker, but funding for treatment may be available from other sources **see section 5 of this document**.
- **Asylum Seeker** - The Commonwealth Government classifies an asylum seeker as “a person who has applied for a refugee protection visa onshore (866, 785 or 790) and is waiting for a decision on this application or appeal”.
- Asylum seekers may:
 - live in the community
 - be held in closed or community detention facilities e.g. an immigration detention centre facility or alternate place of detention.
- Visa status and Medicare eligibility should be checked on each presentation. Individuals may move from one Commonwealth Government classification to another and eligibility for Medicare can change.
 - With patient consent, a person’s visa status can be checked by using the Department of Home Affairs’ (DHA) [Visa Entitlement Verification Online](#) (VEVO) system.
 - For information on Medicare eligibility see **Table 1**, or example of cards mentioned see **Table 2**. Alternatively, their Medicare eligibility can be checked through [Health Professional Online Services](#) (HPOS).
 - An asylum seeker support service can also verify their circumstances.
- Expiry of a person’s bridging visa does not mean they are no longer an asylum seeker for the purposes of this Directive. Asylum Seeker support providers can provide a letter confirming a person’s status as per advice on **section 5 of this document**.
- **If a person indicates a need, engage and interpreter to assist with communication.**

3. Provision of healthcare to asylum seekers

3.1 Considerations when providing healthcare services to people from asylum seeker backgrounds

People seeking asylum may face various barriers to accessing health services in Queensland, including:

- Language barriers, and availability of suitably qualified interpreters competent in communicating medical conditions, terminology, and treatments
- having limited information about the Australian health system or the complexity of the health system compounded by inconsistent Medicare access
- varying degrees of competence, skills, experience, and exposure of healthcare staff (medical and administrative) in providing healthcare services to people from different cultural backgrounds
- diversity of cultural traditions, beliefs, taboos, and norms
- inconsistent income support and limited work rights which result in significant financial hardship
- exposure to past trauma, torture, fear of authority, mental illness, and poor health literacy.

3.2 Visa Classification Exceptions

During humanitarian crisis or other critical circumstances, cohorts of people on temporary visas not covered by this policy may be recognised as asylum seekers for the purposes of QH-HSD-045:2016 at the discretion of the Minister or Director-General.

This may occur where the Queensland Government recognises a cohort of people are seeking protection in Australia, but the cohort is not able to access a visa type that provides eligibility for Medicare.

HHSs will be advised of these exceptions and how to identify people who fall into these arrangements.

3.3 Queensland Health treats asylum seekers at no charge because:

- Health care is a basic human right.
- Community expectation is that government will treat those in need of medical help with compassion and respect (the public heart).
- HHSs have an obligation not to provide preferential treatment – care must always be based on assessed clinical need before all other considerations.

The [Human Rights Act 2019](#) protects the rights of everyone in Queensland. You don't need to be a resident or have a particular citizenship or visa status. The legislation includes a right to access health services.

The [Multicultural Recognition Act 2016](#) (Queensland) sets the vision of an inclusive, harmonious and united Queensland where people of all cultures, languages and faiths feel a strong sense of belonging and can achieve their goals.

[Our story, our future](#) Queensland's Multicultural Policy enacts this vision and articulates commitments towards supporting refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, the Policy states that "the Queensland Government will support refugees and asylum seekers to reduce barriers and create opportunities for them to participate and contribute to Queensland's economic, social and cultural future".

The [Multicultural Queensland Charter](#), as established by the Multicultural Recognition Act, requires Chief Executives of government entities to consider the Charter's principles when developing policies or providing services.

In particular, the Charter highlights that “...equitable access to the services provided or funded by the Government for all people of Queensland helps build a fair community”.

[Refugee health and wellbeing: a policy and action plan for Queensland 2017-2020](#) vision is that all people from refugee backgrounds calling Queensland home have access to the right care, at the right time and in the right place to ensure they have the best possible health and wellbeing. Queensland Health has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Commonwealth which sets out a framework for cooperation for the provision of health services to detainees.

4. Information required as proof of asylum seeker status

- **Medicare card** if the patient is Medicare eligible
- **Photographic proof of identification**, (e.g. Driver’s licence, passport or [ImmiCard](#)) this is required for clinical reasons.
 - Due to their asylum seeker journey, some asylum seekers may not have valid photographic identification. In this case, other documentation proving their asylum seeker status may assist in the identification process.
 - **Sample questions** to use to obtain information
 - ‘Have you ever applied for a refugee/humanitarian protection visa in Australia?’
 - ‘Do you have a letter or other identification with you to help us understand your situation?’
 - ‘Do you have someone helping you like a caseworker?’, If yes ‘What organisation is your caseworker from (e.g. Multicultural Australia (MA), ACCESS, Romero Centre, Red Cross, Mater Refugee Complex Care Clinic (MRCCC), World Wellness Group?)’.
- **Other documentation** that may assist in the identification of asylum seeker status, patients should be asked for documents that could include:
 - documentation from the DHA confirming their current visa status
 - protection visa application letter – a letter acknowledging submission of a protection claim for asylum
 - Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) payment card
 - judicial review documentation – re-application for Bridging Visa Sub-Class E (BVE) following a negative protection decision
 - expiring or expired substantive visa as evidence of their existing status
 - documentation from support providers such as Red Cross, Australian Migrant English Service and those listed in **Table 3**.
- **International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) card**, the cards are provided to asylum seekers in detention. A case worker or other employee of International Health and Medical Services (IHMS or DHA) may accompany the asylum seeker to appointments.
- The patient’s visa status must be checked on [VEVO](#) on each presentation as Medicare eligibility, entitlements and decisions on visa status can change at any time.
- It may not always be possible for asylum seeker to provide evidence of their status. If unsure, seek advice from a specialist asylum seeker agency as listed below.

4.1 Asylum seekers living in the community whose visas have expired

- It is not uncommon for asylum seekers to have an expired bridging visa status on VEVO. An expired visa does not mean that a person is no longer an asylum seeker.

- Where an asylum seeker's visa status has expired, support providers, including SRSS organisations and eligible asylum seeker support agencies, including healthcare providers, may confirm a person's status as an asylum seeker via a support letter. A list of eligible organisations is provided at **Table 3**.

4.1.1 A support letter must:

- Be presented on letterhead of an organisation listed in **Table 3**
- Be an original letter i.e. not photocopied
- Be dated within six months of presentation to the HHS
- Confirm that the person is known as a person seeking asylum in Australia and residing in Queensland, and that this status continues
- Provide contact details for a person within that organisation who can be contacted within usual business hours to confirm the contents of the letter.
- If the letter is generated by a healthcare provider, there is an option to present an overview of a patient's health conditions. This is for information only and does not constitute a medical referral or clinical assessment as the letter is not intended for clinical purpose.
- HHS staff are encouraged to contact the person nominated on the letter to confirm the patient's status.

4.2 Identification of people with visa classification exemptions

Where the Minister or Director-General recognise a cohort of people under section 3.2 of this policy, identification criteria will be included in specific advice.

5. Cost recovery of medical treatment for Medicare-ineligible asylum seeker

5.1 Asylum seekers in the community

- Where the person seeking asylum is an eligible SRSS service recipient, check if the client has a 'Letter of Supply' from their relevant SRSS service provider. Alternatively, with the individual's consent, you can contact their SRSS provider to recover costs.
- If a person seeking asylum is ineligible for SRSS, they may be receiving support from a community organisation. Many of these organisations do not have capacity to provide intensive financial support. Unless the organisation volunteers to cover the costs, it should not be expected to do so.

5.2 Asylum seekers in detention

- If an asylum seeker is in a detention facility or community detention, they are Medicare-ineligible, and their health care is funded through IHMS and invoices for healthcare services should be raised to that organisation.

6. Privacy and Confidentiality of patient information

- HHS staff are required to maintain all patient's privacy and confidentiality under part 7 of the *Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011*. HHS staff must not directly or indirectly provide patient information to anyone (including Commonwealth Departments e.g. DHA) without that patient's consent.
- Any requests for information about a patient should be referred to the HHS's privacy and confidentiality contact officer for advice on the response.

7. Attachments

Table 1 provides a summary of visa types and entitlements as at August 2017.

Table 2 provides Identification card samples.

Table 3 lists organisations which are eligible to provide a letter confirming a person's asylum seeker's status if their visa has expired.

8. Additional information

Immigration policies and visa entitlements change regularly so it is important to continually check a patient's status. Quick links to relevant information:

Visa status: Check through DHA's [VEVO](#) system, or Contact SRSS service providers (with consent of the individual):

- Access Community Services, phone (07) 3412 8222; or
- Multicultural Australia, phone (07) 3337 5400.

Medicare eligibility: check through [Health Professional Online Services](#) (HPOS)

IHMS payments: contact [International Health and Medical Services](#) (IHMS) or phone (02) 9372 2500.

For more information

- Regarding revenue contact your local HHS revenue officer; or the Revenue Strategy and Support Unit, Finance Branch on CompensableRevenue@health.qld.gov.au or (07) 3199 3450.
- Regarding this policy, contact Strategy, Policy and Legislation Branch on StrategicPolicy@health.qld.gov.au or (07) 3708 5601.

Table 1 – Medicare eligibility – (as at August 2017)

	Description	Visa subclass	Medicare eligibility	Fees and Charges	Other information
Refugee (offshore and onshore)	<p>A person whose asylum claim has been successful and who has received a refugee protection visa. Refugee protection visas are granted if someone is found to have 'a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention).</p>	<p>Offshore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 200 (Refugee) - 201 (In-country special humanitarian) - 202 (Global special humanitarian) - 203 (Emergency rescue) - 204 (Women at risk) <p>Onshore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 866 (Protection) - 785 (Temporary protection) - 790 (Safe haven enterprise) 	<p>Medicare eligible</p> <p>May also hold a healthcare concession card.</p>	<p>If the person chooses to be a public patient most services are 'free of charge'.</p> <p>If the person chooses to be a private patient, they will be charged as a Medicare eligible patient for admitted and/or outpatient services.</p>	<p>Some refugees will be newly arrived while others may have been in Australia for many years.</p> <p>Offshore + onshore 866 – permanent residents with full work rights.</p> <p>Onshore 785 and 790 – temporary residents with work rights and additional conditions.</p> <p>Refugees in the 785 and 790 visa subclasses were once in the asylum seeker grouping and may require additional assistance with understanding their Medicare eligibility.</p>
Asylum Seeker in Detention	<p>A detainee can either be residing in community detention or be in an immigration detention centre facility or alternate place of detention. Detention centre facilities can be in Australia or offshore.</p> <p>Detainees can be 'asylum seekers' but can also include those that are not seeking asylum – for example, visa overstayers.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>Not eligible for Medicare</p> <p>IHMS is contracted by DHA to facilitate and pay for a specified range of health services. Not all health services are covered. QH has a MoU with IHMS for the provision of health services to detainees.</p>	<p>Patient services are billed directly to IHMS.</p>	<p>Community:</p> <p>Patients in this group should carry an IHMS card to identify themselves.</p> <p>Facility-based:</p> <p>Services should be provided on the basis of a planned arrival; in most cases IHMS will contact the HHS.</p>

	Description	Visa subclass	Medicare eligibility	Fees and Charges	Other information
Asylum Seeker in the community (not in detention)	<p>A person who has applied for a refugee protection visa onshore (866, 785 or 790) and is waiting for a decision on this application (either a primary decision or an appeals decision).</p> <p>OR</p> <p>A person who has applied for a refugee protection visa onshore (866, 785 or 790) and has been found not to engage Australia's protection obligations and has exhausted all appeals processes but are still residing in the community. These asylum seekers are commonly called 'finally determined'.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>A person who did not apply for a refugee protection visa (785 or 790) by the 1 October 2017 deadline – Lodge or leave policy.</p>	<p>Mostly Bridging Visas (usually BVE – 050 and 051) but could be other subclasses depending on mode and time of arrival in Australia and processing status.</p>	<p>Varies – case by case</p> <p>If the Bridging Visa or original entry visa has work rights, then Medicare eligible.</p> <p>May not be Medicare eligible if 'finally determined' and not working to depart Australia.</p> <p>May also not be Medicare eligible if part of the 'legacy caseload' of 'illegal maritime arrivals' and has not applied for protection by 1 October 2017 (Lodge or leave policy).</p> <p>Check Medicare eligibility at each presentation as it changes.</p> <p>May also hold a healthcare card.</p>	<p>If Medicare eligible: as per 'refugee'.</p> <p>Some asylum seekers may qualify for the SRSS to cover costs associated with their healthcare. If so, fees should be raised and sent to the relevant SRSS provider for payment.</p> <p>As per the Minister's 29 July 2017 asylum seeker announcement, no costs should be directly charged to the individual.</p> <p>If the asylum seeker is not Medicare eligible or a SRSS client, then HHSs should write off their fees.</p>	<p>Bridging visas expire, meaning Medicare cards also expire. There could be gaps in eligibility while visa renewal processes are undertaken.</p> <p>Asylum seekers should have an ImmiCard. The ImmiCard contains a unique identifier number linked to the person's details in DIBP's systems. Visa status can be checked on DIBP's VEVO system.</p> <p>SRSS clients could have a Letter of Supply from their relevant SRSS provider.</p> <p>The Department of Human Services can also check Medicare eligibility.</p>

Table 2 – Identification card samples


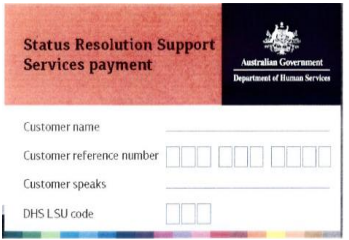
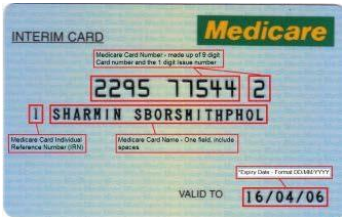

 <p>The image shows an Australian Government ImmiCard. It features a photo of a man on the left. Text on the card includes: 'Evidence of Immigration Status Australian Government ImmiCard', 'Customer CITIZEN', 'Given Names JOHN', 'Date of Birth 01 OCT 80', 'Sex M', 'ImmiCard No E15014187', and 'Card Expires 15 FEB 14'. A blue 'ImmiCard' logo is at the bottom left.</p>	<p>Immicard</p> <p>Issued to people on Bridging Visa E (BVE-subclass 050 or 051). May also be issued to people in the review process and certain classes of refugees.</p>
 <p>The image shows a 'Status Resolution Support Services payment' card. It has a red header with the text 'Status Resolution Support Services payment' and the Australian Government Department of Human Services logo. Below the header are fields for 'Customer name', 'Customer reference number' (with a 10-digit grid), 'Customer speaks', and 'DHS LSU code' (with a 3-digit grid).</p>	<p>Status Resolution Support (SRSS) payment card</p> <p>Issues to individuals receiving these payments</p>
 <p>The image shows an 'INTERIM CARD Medicare' for SHARIN SBORSHITHPHOL. It includes a Medicare Card Number (2295 77544 2), a Medicare Card Individual Reference Number (1), and a valid-to date of 16/04/06. Red boxes highlight the card number, name, and expiry date. Text at the top explains that the Medicare Card Number consists of a 9-digit card number and a 1-digit issue number.</p>	<p>Interim Medicare card</p> <p>May be issued to temporary residents or asylum seekers dependent on visa types. Note: these cards do have expiry dates.</p>
 <p>The image shows two versions of an International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) card. The left card is for a DIAC Patient with Name: DIAC, Patient; Patient ID#: 1-2NIEAK; and DOB: 1/1/2000. The right card is for a nominated person with Name: DIAC, Patient; Patient ID#: 1-2NIEAK; and DOB: 1/1/2000. Both cards include the IHMS logo and the text 'For use by the nominated person only'.</p>	<p>International Health and Medical Services card</p> <p>Issued to individuals in community detention</p>

Table 3 – Asylum Seeker service providers and healthcare providers

Provider	Type of services	Contact	Address	Website
Access Community Services Limited	Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS), Casework & advocacy, Health services, Education & training, Mental health (general), Referrals, Complex Case Support (CCS), Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS),	(07) 3412 8222 enquiries@acsl.org.au	92 Wembley Road, Logan Central QLD 4114	http://www.accesscommunity.org.au/
Australian Red Cross (Migration Support and Services Hub)	SRSS, Casework & advocacy, Referrals	07 3367 5665 qldredcross@redcross.org.au	Humanity Place 49 Park Rd, Milton QLD 4064	http://www.redcross.org.au/migration-hubs.aspx
Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba	Settlement Grants Program (SGP)	(07) 4632 4277 bishsec@twb.catholic.org.au	68 Lindsay Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350	http://www.twb.catholic.org.au/
Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba, Social Justice Commission	Settlement support, Advocacy	(07) 4613 0895 justice@twb.catholic.org.au	St Patrick's Cathedral Centre, 123 Neil Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350	http://www.twb.catholic.org.au/ministry/social-justice-commission/
Centacare Cairns	Casework & advocacy, Employment support, Mental health (general), Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), Settlement Grants Program (SGP)	(07) 4044 0130 admin@centacarefnq.org	22-34 Aplin Street, Cairns City QLD 4870	https://www.centacarefnq.org/
Community	Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance Program (ASRA) Coordination, Transport and Home Assistance	(07) 3135 9050 admin@communify.org.au	180 Jubilee Terrace, Bardon QLD 4065	https://communify.org.au/
Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland	Settlement Grants Program (SGP), Aged Care Services, Community Health Information	(07) 3844 9166 administration@eccq.com.au	253 Boundary St, West End QLD 4101	http://www.eccq.com.au/

Friends of HEAL Foundation	Mental health (general)	0413 627 826 admin@fheal.com.au	35 Orontes Road, Yeronga QLD 4104	www.fheal.com.au
Inala Community House	Casework & advocacy, Referrals, Social activities, Settlement Grants Program (SGP)	(07) 3372 1711 reception@ich.org.au	38 Sittella St, Inala QLD 4077	http://www.ich.org.au/
Indooroopilly Uniting Church	Asylum seeker and Refugee Support Hub	3878 9535 iucasylum@gmail.com	74 Station Road, Indooroopilly QLD 4068	https://indooroopillyuc.org.au/what-we-do/care-and-relief/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-support-group/
Mater Refugee Complex Care Clinic	Referrals, Asylum seeker health service, Refugee Health, SRSS	07 3163 2880 Referral Fax 07 3163 8548 mrccc@mater.org.au	Level 4, Salmon Building Raymond Terrace South Brisbane 4101	https://www.materonline.org.au/services/refugee-services/mater-refugee-complex-care-clinic
Multicultural Australia (MA) Ltd	Humanitarian Settlement Services, Advocacy, SRSS, Youth support, Referrals	(07) 3337 5400	28 Dibley Street, Woolloongabba QLD 4102	https://www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au/
Mercy Community Services	Settlement Grants Program	(07) 3866 4160 info@mercyics.org.au	22 Morris Street, Woolloowin QLD 4030	http://www.mercyics.org.au/
Milpera State High School	Education & training Employment support, English classes, Mental health (torture & trauma services), Referrals, Social activities	(07) 3270 3222 admin@milperashs.eq.edu.au	2 Parker Street, Chelmer QLD 4068	https://milperashs.eq.edu.au/Pages/default.aspx
Multilink Community Services Inc	Casework & advocacy, Education & training, Housing (general assistance), Mental health (general), Referrals, SGP	(07) 3808 4463 support@MultiLink.org.au	38 Blackwood Road, Logan Central QLD 4114	http://www.multilink.org.au
Northern Australia Primary Health Care LTD Refugee Health Coordination Nurse	Health services	(074) 722-8763 ggreen@naphl.com.au	Level 4 Clinical Practice Building, 1 James Cook Drive, Douglas QLD 4814	https://www.naphl.com.au
Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma	Family & Youth support, Training (professional) Mental health (torture & trauma services), Advocacy, SGP	07 3391 6677 admin@qpastt.org.au	28 Dibley Street, Woolloongabba QLD 4102	http://qpastt.org.au/

Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)	Casework & advocacy, Education & training, Legal advice (non-visa matters and visa matters), SGP, Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme	(07) 3846 9300 amin@rails.org.au	Level 1, 170 Boundary Street, West End QLD 4101	www.rails.org.au
Romero Centre	Casework & advocacy, Employment support, English classes, Housing (general assistance), Housing (transitional), Material aid (household goods, food), Referrals	(07) 3013 0100 romero.admin@mercyys.org.au	20 Dutton Street, Dutton Park QLD 4102	http://www.romero.mercyys.org.au/
St Vincent de Paul Society QLD	Casework & advocacy, Housing (general assistance), Advocacy, Referrals, Mental health (general), Settlement Services, SGP, Youth support	07 3381 4500 rebecca.barnett@svdpqld.org.au	10 Merivale St, South Brisbane QLD 4101	www.vinnies.org.au
TAFE Queensland English Language and Literacy Services	Employment support, English classes, AMEP Providers	(07) 3244 5488 tells@tafe.qld.edu.au	Level 3, A Block 66 Ernest Street, South Brisbane QLD 4101	http://tafeqld.edu.au/about-us/TELLS/
Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support	Casework & advocacy, Employment support, English classes, Referrals, Social activities	1300 477 433 enquiries@catholiccare.services	502 Ruthven Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350	http://www.catholiccare.services/services/trams/
Townsville Multicultural Support Group	Casework & advocacy, English classes, Housing (general assistance), Referrals, Humanitarian Settlement Services, SGP	(07) 4775 1588 admin@tmsg.org.au	63 Ross River Road, Mundingburra QLD 4812	http://www.tmsg.org.au/
World Wellness Group (WWG)	Humanitarian Settlement Services, Referral, Refugee & Asylum seeker health, Mental health and wellbeing services, advocacy, allied health services, International health student health	(07) 3333 2100 admin@worldwellnessgroup.org.au	33 Stoneham Street, Stones Corner, QLD, 4120	Health Services – World Wellness Group