

# NSW HEALTH CARE SYSTEM Information Booklet



# Are you a newly arrived refugee or migrant?

This booklet gives you information about health services in NSW.



# Health Cards

## Medicare

Medicare is Australia's public health insurance scheme.

To get a Medicare Card:

1. Ring **132 011** and ask for your nearest Medicare office.
2. Go to the Medicare office and ask for the *Welcome Kit*.
3. Fill out a form for your Medicare card at the office. You will need to show your passport, a second form of identification, and possibly your travel documents.



An example of Medicare Card

Medicare pays for all or part of the cost when you:

- visit local doctors and specialists
- are a public patient in a public hospital
- have an eye test by an optometrist
- have x-rays and pathology tests.

If your doctor bulk bills, your visit is free because Medicare pays the doctor. If your doctor does not bulk bill, you pay the doctor first and then you claim some money back from Medicare.

## Health Care Cards

Centrelink gives a **Health Care Card** or **Pensioner Concession Card** to people who do not earn much or any money and who receive certain benefits and pensions from the government.



An example of Health Care Card

A Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card helps pay for:

- medicines prescribed by the doctor
- ambulance services
- dental treatment at public dental clinics.

For more information, ring the *Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre* on **13 12 02**.

Remember to carry your **Medicare Card** and **Health Care Card** (or **Pensioner Concession Card**) with you all the time.

# Professional interpreters

If you cannot speak English, always ask for a professional interpreter. It is better not to use a family member. Interpreting services are available when you visit your doctor, a hospital, a Community Health Centre or an Early Childhood Centre. These services are free and confidential.

If you need an interpreter:

- Ring and make an appointment with the doctor or health clinic.
- Tell the receptionist that you need an interpreter and they will try to get a free interpreter for you. During your visit the interpreter may be either on the telephone or in the room with you.



You can also phone the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on **13 14 50** and ask to be connected to any service.

# Emergencies

## Going to the emergency department

For health problems that are not serious, you should go to your local doctor.

For a medical emergency, you can go to the **Emergency Department** at the nearest public hospital.

Emergency departments are open **24 hours** a day, seven days a week and always have doctors and nurses on duty.

You may need to wait for several hours in emergency departments because very ill patients must be seen first.

To find your nearest public hospital, look in the telephone directories under *Hospitals, Public*.

## Ambulance

Ambulance officers can give first aid, and may take you to hospital. If you have a *Health Care Card* the ambulance is free. If you do not have a *Health Care Card*, you will have to pay.



## IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

1

Call 000

2

When the operator asks if you want **Fire, Police, Ambulance**, tell them: "**Ambulance**"

3

### If you speak English

Answer the operator's questions about:

- your name
- your telephone number
- the emergency
- the address of the emergency
- the nearest cross street or landmark

### If you cannot speak English

- Tell the operator which language you speak.
- Wait for the operator to connect you to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) - **DO NOT HANG UP.**

# Looking after your health

## NSW Refugee Health Service

If you came to Australia as a refugee, or seeking refugee status, you can contact the Refugee Health Service for:

- a free health assessment
- education about health services in NSW
- information about GPs in your area.

Interpreters are provided free of charge. If you are going to a Refugee Health clinic you should bring a list of any medications you are taking, any medical records you have, and your Medicare Card (if you have one).

Phone **8778 0770**.

## Visiting the local doctor or General Practitioner (GP)

In Australia most people go to a local doctor or general practitioner (GP) when they have health problems. GP offices are called Surgeries or Medical Centres.

Ask someone from your own community if they know a GP who speaks your language. If the GP you go to does not speak your language, that doctor can get a free interpreter on the telephone.

Occasionally the doctor may arrange to have an interpreter in the room with you. In this case, your appointment and

the interpreter would need to be booked two weeks ahead.

When you see a GP you should ask for information about your health problem, and about how the GP will treat you. If you are unhappy with your GP, you can choose to go to another doctor.

To find your nearest GP look in the telephone directory under *Medical Practitioners*. You can make an appointment over the phone for most doctors.

If you have come to Australia as a refugee you can contact the **NSW Refugee Health Service** for a health check. Interpreters are provided free of charge.

Telephone **8778 0770** to make an appointment.



## Seeing a specialist

Your GP may refer you to a specialist if you need more tests or treatment, for example for heart problems you might go to a cardiologist.

To see a specialist you must:

- have a referral letter from your GP
- make an appointment.

Most specialists do not bulk bill, but some will bulk bill people with Health Care Cards.

If your GP wants to refer you to a specialist, ask your GP how much it will cost. If it costs too much, ask the GP to send you to a public hospital clinic. You will have to wait longer, but it is free if you have a Medicare card.

## Medicines

Your doctor may give you a prescription for medicine.

You must take the prescription to a chemist (pharmacy). You can get some medicines, such as antibiotics, only if you have a prescription from a doctor. You should show the chemist your Medicare card, and Health Care Card or Pensioner Card if you have one. Most medicines cost less for people with a Health Care Card or Pensioner Card.

If you or your family need a lot of medicines in one year, ask the pharmacist about the Safety Net. Once you have spent a set amount on medicines, you will then pay less for any other medicines needed that year.

## Public hospitals

Public hospitals are free for people with a Medicare Card (when treated as a public patient). Public patients in public hospitals are treated by doctors and specialists from the hospital.

## The role of nurses in Australia

Australian nurses are highly trained health professionals. Many specialise in particular areas of healthcare such as mothers and babies (midwives), children (early childhood nurses), or emotional health (mental health nurses).

Refugee health nurses, who work for the NSW Refugee Health Service in Sydney, or for other clinics around the state, care for recently arrived refugees. Many nurse specialists manage their own patients and clinics, without a doctor present. Some nurses can order tests, give medication or refer you to medical specialists.



## Public dental services

If you have a *Health Care Card* or *Pensioner Concession Card*, you can use the public dental services. All children and students under 18 years of age can also use free public dental services.

There are several public dental clinics across New South Wales. The clinics have waiting lists for people seeking treatment. If you want to go to a public dental clinic:

- Call the **Oral Health Intake and Information Service** in your area (see list on the right).
- Answer the questions that the staff ask about yourself and your dental problem.
- The clinic will arrange your first appointment to check your needs.

If you cannot speak English:

Ring TIS **13 14 50** before you contact the **Oral Health Intake** and Information Service in your area. You will need to tell the operator the phone number you want to call.



## Oral Health Intake and Information Services

Sydney/South Western Sydney

☎ **1300 559 393**

Western Sydney/Nepean Blue Mountains

☎ **1300 739 949**

South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra

☎ **1300 134 226** | ☎ **1300 369 651**

Northern Sydney Central Coast

☎ **1300 651 625** | ☎ **1300 789 404**

Hunter New England/ Mid North Coast/  
Northern NSW

☎ **1300 651 625**

Southern NSW/Murrumbidgee

☎ **1800 450 046**

Western NSW/Far West

☎ **1300 552 626**

If you do not have a *Health Care Card* or *Pensioner Concession Card*, you have to go to a private dental clinic.



## Community Health Centres

In addition to your GP, **Community Health Centres** can give you help with some health and welfare problems.

At the Community Health Centres you can see:

- social workers or psychologists who give counselling and social support eg: for alcohol and drug problems
- specially trained community nurses who help parents and children and older people
- physiotherapists who help people after illness or injury
- speech pathologists who help children with speech problems.

Community Health Centres often have multicultural health workers to help people from local ethnic groups. There may be a small fee for some services.

## Women's health services

Women's Health Centres give information and advice to women about many things such as reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, domestic violence, pap smears, breast checks, menstrual problems and menopause. They also have different support groups for women.

If someone who cares for you, or someone close to you, is hurting you or your family, or making you feel scared, call the **Domestic Violence Help Line** anytime on **1800 6564 63**. In Australia, domestic violence is a crime and families have the right to be protected.

## Children's health services

There are a number of services that help parents with children.

At the Early Childhood Health Centres nurses:

- help parents to care for their babies and young children
- give advice about immunisations
- can arrange home visits.

Tresillian and Karitane are organisations that help parents and carers with children under 5 years of age. They can help you:

- with breastfeeding
- if your baby won't sleep
- if you are upset.

Tresillian has a 24-hour parent help line. If you are living in Sydney, call **9787 0855**. If you are living outside Sydney call **1800 637 357**.

Karitane also have a 24-hour telephone help line on **9794 2300**.



## Youth health services

In NSW there are health centres for people between 12 and 24 years of age. These centres also give help to parents. Youth health centres give health education, information and advice. These services are confidential. These centres are:

### Health Services

Corner Youth Health Service (Bankstown)

☎ **9796 8633**

Fairfield /Liverpool Youth Health Team

☎ **8717 1717**

Kirketon Road Health Centre (Kings Cross)

☎ **9360 2766**

Canterbury Youth Health Service

☎ **9787 0600** | ☎ **9718 1485**

Cellblock (Camperdown)

☎ **9516 2233**

Western Area Adolescent Team

☎ **9881 1230**

Traxside (Campbelltown)

☎ **4625 2525**

High Street Youth Health Centre (Harris Park)

☎ **9687 2544**

The Warehouse (Penrith)

☎ **4721 8330**

Community Health Adolescents  
in Need (Wollongong)

☎ **4226 5816**

# Looking after your emotional health

## STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors)

This service has counsellors who can help refugees and people from refugee backgrounds who have experienced torture or have suffered traumatic experiences before coming to Australia. Many staff members can speak different languages. Phone **9794 1900**.

*STARTTS services are free and confidential.*

## Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC)

This centre is for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. It gives help to people who are having emotional or mental problems. TMHC can arrange psychological checks and short-term counselling. Their staff speak over 50 languages. All services are free and confidential. You do not need a Medicare Card to use this service. GPs and health care workers can give you a referral. You can also phone TMHC on **1800 648 911**.

## Mental Health Services

If you are having social or emotional problems, you can also contact your local Mental Health Service. You can talk to psychiatrists, psychologists or social workers who can help you or your family. All services are free and confidential. To find your nearest Mental Health Service, ring your nearest public hospital or Community Health Centre, or ask your local doctor.



# Health rights & responsibilities

Health workers means doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors and others.

## Your rights

Health workers must explain to you:

- your condition or disease
- medical tests
- the treatment
- possible side-effects or risks from the treatment.

All patients have the right to:

- be treated with care, consideration and dignity
- have their beliefs and cultural and religious practices respected
- obtain other medical opinions
- see their personal medical records
- have their personal medical records kept confidential from others
- you must give consent before receiving treatment. In most cases this will be verbal consent. Written consent is required for some procedures, such as surgery
- children under 14 years of age must have the consent of a parent or guardian
- children between the ages of 14 to 16 years usually give consent jointly with their parents or guardians; however they can give sole consent

as long as they show that they fully understand the proposed treatment

- choose to withdraw consent and refuse further treatment at any time
- seek help from a health care interpreter.



## Your responsibilities

You must:

- tell health workers everything about your health
- tell health workers if you use medicines, alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- keep appointment times or inform health workers if you are unable to attend an appointment, especially if an interpreter has been booked
- respect all hospital policies and practices

- not harass abuse, threaten or put any person at risk of physical or psychological harm.

## How to make a complaint

In Australia, you can complain about a health service or health worker.

If something goes wrong with your treatment or care, the health care system should tell you about it as soon as possible. They should apologise; explain what has happened, tell you about possible effects and what they are doing to prevent it happening again.

If you are still not satisfied after speaking to the health worker:

- ring the hospital where you have received treatment and ask for the **Patient Support Officer** or
- ring the health centre where you received treatment and ask for the **Manager** or
- contact the **Health Care Complaints Commission** on **1800 043 159** (free call).

If you do not speak English contact TIS on **131 450**.







Produced by **NSW Refugee Health Service**

In collaboration with SSI (Settlement Services International)

[www.refugeehealth.org.au](http://www.refugeehealth.org.au)

Phone: 8778 0770

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