
Community health centres

Summary

- Community health services aim to keep individuals and families in better health by taking into account their environment and social conditions.
 - The services available at CHSs depend on the needs of the families and other specific groups living in the area.
 - Fees are charged for services according to the client's ability to pay, and can be negotiated or waived if payment is difficult.
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Community health centres, also referred to as community health services (CHSs), operate across the state and aim to provide a broad range of services and health promotion activities to local populations, particularly those who have or are at risk of the poorest health and have the greatest economic and social needs.

CHSs are agencies that receive Community Health Program funding from the Department of Health. There are approximately 100 CHSs in Victoria operating from approximately 350 sites.

Community health services sit alongside general practice and privately funded services, and other health and support services, to make up the majority of the primary health sector in Victoria. State-funded primary health care predominantly refers to dental, allied health, counselling, nursing services and health promotion.

The services available depend on the needs of individuals, families and the community living in the area. Most community health program funding supports flexibility in the delivery of services, and enables CHSs to develop models of care that meet the needs of their local communities. However, specific initiatives deliver particular services to vulnerable population groups.

Community health services focus on health promotion, and disease prevention and management, which are designed to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents, as well as take pressure off the acute care health system.

Aims of community health services

Community health services aim to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents by:

- Encouraging people to actively participate in their own health care
- Working together with other primary health care providers such as general practitioners (GPs) to provide coordinated care
- Liaising with other health agencies and service providers to fill service gaps
- Encouraging individuals and community groups to actively participate in the centre's activities, including service planning, fundraising and volunteer work
- Promoting prevention of lifestyle-related diseases and conditions
- Developing health care programs and activities to improve social and physical environments in the community.

Services offered

The services offered vary between community health services, depending on the needs of the local area. Primary health services could include:

- Counselling and support services
 - Health promotion activities
 - Medical and nursing services
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- Dental health
- Allied health, including audiology, dietetics, exercise physiology, physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy and speech therapy.

Other services and supports may include:

- Aged care services
- Alcohol and drug programs
- Carer respite
- Maternal and child health services
- Mental health programs
- Disability services
- Outreach services
- Problem gambling programs
- Rehabilitation programs
- Support for self-help

Community health services are available to everyone

CHSs offer affordable health care, particularly for people on low incomes. Services are available to all local residents, regardless of income, although fees apply. These fees are charged for services according to the client's ability to pay, and can be negotiated or waived if payment is difficult. Health Care Card holders are charged a heavily discounted fee.

Contact your local community health service direct for more information. Addresses are listed in the telephone book or you can use the Better Health Channel services directory. Alternatively, ask your doctor about how your local CHS could help you maintain or improve your health and wellbeing.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Better Health Channel services directory

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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