
Children and health services

Summary

- There are many free or low-cost health services for children in Victoria.
 - As a parent, it is up to you to make decisions about your child's healthcare. You have the right to see their medical records and also to get a second opinion from another doctor.
 - Medicare provides free or low-cost healthcare for visits to doctors, specialists, optometrists and, in some cases, other healthcare professionals such as dentists.
 - Various government programs are available that provide financial support to help Victorian families to use health services such as dental care, mental health services, maternal and child health services and disability supports.
 - There are a number of parenting helplines and websites available to Victorian families that offer information on children's health. You can call Parentline on 13 22 89 for counselling and advice on children's health issues.
 - NURSE-ON-CALL is a phone service providing immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1300 6060 24.
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There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria. There are also health and support services available for refugee children and children with disabilities.

As a parent (or legal guardian) it is your role to interact with healthcare professionals on behalf of your child. All decisions you make must be in your child's best interests.

The role and responsibility of a parent in their child's healthcare

As a parent (or legal guardian) you are responsible for talking to healthcare professionals and making medical treatment decisions on your child's behalf. You have the right to access your child's medical records. You also have the right to seek a second opinion before making treatment decisions.

Informed consent

If your child needs a medical examination, treatment, surgery or admission to hospital, healthcare professionals must inform, consult with and involve you in the decision-making process. This is so you can make an informed decision about medical treatment for your child needs and provide informed consent for that treatment.

Informed consent means that you understand your child's condition and the proposed medical treatment, including its risks, benefits and possible complications. However, your consent is not required in emergency situations where your child needs immediate treatment to save their life or prevent serious injury to their health and you are unable to provide consent at the time.

See the [**Informed consent for medical treatment**](#) fact sheet.

Confidentiality and privacy and children's healthcare

Medical confidentiality is a set of rules that protects the information you discuss with your healthcare professionals, including your child's health. Privacy is the ability of your healthcare provider to keep information about you and your child, your child's health, and your child's healthcare hidden.

See the [**Confidentiality and privacy in healthcare**](#) fact sheet.

Financial assistance to help pay for child health services

Medicare is Australia's national public health insurance scheme. If your child is an Australian citizen or permanent

resident, then they will be covered by Medicare. The scheme provides free or subsidised healthcare for visits to doctors, specialists, optometrists and, in some cases, other healthcare professionals such as dentists.

Medicare covers the cost of treatment in public hospitals and subsidises the cost of a wide range of health services and medications.

Although Medicare pays for the bulk of healthcare costs, health care practitioners who provide services covered by Medicare sometimes charge more than the Medicare rebate. If this is the case, there will be out-of-pocket expenses incurred for the service your child receives. An example of this is where a general practitioner does **not** bulk-bill for their services. Speak to your health care practitioner to find out more about out-of-pocket expenses.

Private health insurance is an option that can enhance control over the treatment you and your family receives and help recover costs not covered by Medicare.

Various government programs are available that provide financial support for Victorian families to help access health services. These programs include the Commonwealth Child Dental Benefits Schedule, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Aids and Equipment program and many more.

Community health services for children

Community health services in Victoria offer free or low-cost allied health and support services to Victorian children and their families.

Services provided to children and families include:

- dietetics
- family counselling
- physiotherapy
- psychology
- podiatry
- occupational therapy
- speech pathology.

Contact your local community health service for more information. You can search for your nearest community health service using the **[Better Health Channel services directory](#)**. Alternatively, ask your doctor about how your local community health service could help you maintain or improve your child's health and wellbeing.

Maternal and child health services

The maternal and child health service is a free service available to all Victorian families with children under six years of age. There are maternal and child health centres in every local government area in Victoria. The centres are staffed by qualified maternal and child health nurses, with support from a range of other healthcare professionals.

For more information see the **[Maternal and child health services](#)** or the **[Early parenting services](#)** fact sheets.

The Maternal and Child Health Line is a free helpline for Victorian families and is staffed by maternal and child health nurses who can give you information, support and advice regarding your child's health, maternal and family health and parenting issues. Call the helpline on 13 22 29.

Dental health services for children

The Victorian Government offers free or subsidised general dental care to all children aged 0-12 years through Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV).

DHSV provides services directly through the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne and 54 community health services and rural hospitals. To find your nearest community dental clinic, see the **[Dental Health Services Victoria](#)** website.

The Commonwealth Child Dental Benefits Schedule provides up to \$1,000 per child in dental benefits over a two-year period for children aged between two and 17 years in families receiving Family Tax Benefit A.

See the Public dental care in Victoria fact sheet.

Some private health insurance policies cover dental care through their 'extras' cover. Check your health insurance policy or with your health insurance provider, if you have one.

Mental health services for children

If your child is dealing with a mental health issue, it is important to know who you can talk to and where you can get help. If you are concerned about the mental health of your child because of worrying behaviour, there are services you can turn to.

A good place to start is to speak to your doctor, maternal health nurse or school counsellor about your concerns. You can ask for a referral to mental health support services such as child psychologists or child psychiatrists if needed.

See the [**Children, young people and mental health**](#) fact sheet.

Support services for children with disabilities

Children with disabilities and their families and carers can access a range of disability support services, many of which are funded by the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services.

You can find out about government-funded supports and services such as the Aids and Equipment program through the Victorian Government's Disability Intake and Response Service. This service can also provide help with planning and short-term support to people with disabilities, their families and carers in their local area. Contact the Disability Intake and Response Service on 1800 783 783.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is a new way of providing support to people with a disability based on support packages that are tailored to each person's individual needs. This is instead of giving block funding to organisations to provide disability support. To find out more see the [**National Disability Insurance Scheme**](#) fact sheet.

For more information on support services for children with a disability, see the Diagnosis of a disability during childhood and [**Early support for a child with disabilities**](#) fact sheets.

Child health services and support for asylum seekers and refugees

Asylum seekers and refugees in Victoria, including children, are able to access most health and community services funded by the Victorian Government because eligibility for most services is not determined by visa or residency status. These services include community health services, the Refugee Health Program, torture and trauma counselling and the catch-up immunisation program.

See the [**Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services**](#) fact sheet.

Telephone helplines and online support for Victorian families

There are a number of parenting helplines and websites available to Victorian families that offer health advice and information on children's health including:

- **Maternal and Child Health Advisory Line** – call **13 22 29** for this 24-hour telephone service for Victorian families with children from birth to school age.
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** - call **1300 60 60 24** for immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Parentline** – call **13 22 89** for this telephone counselling service for Victorian parents and carers of children up to 18 years of age. The service is available from 8am to 12am, seven days a week.
- **Raising Children Network** – an online parenting resource with advice about children of all age groups.

Where to get help

- Maternal and Child Health Line, call 13 22 29
- NURSE-ON-CALL, CALL 1300 60 60 24

- Parentline, call 13 22 89

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

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