
Healthcare system in Victoria

Summary

- The healthcare system in Victoria provides high-quality health prevention, treatment and care to all Victorians.
 - Treatment in public hospitals is free while care in private hospitals has to be paid for by the person receiving the care or by their private health insurance.
 - It is up to you whether you are treated in the private or public part of the Victorian health system.
 - Although ambulance services are managed by the Victorian Government, there is a cost for calling an ambulance that has to be paid for by the patient, by their ambulance subscription or private health insurance.
 - Your GP is the best place to start if you need to see a doctor about your health.
 - Go to the emergency department if you require urgent medical treatment.
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The healthcare system in Victoria provides high-quality health treatment, care, education and disease prevention for all Victorians. It includes a wide range of healthcare professionals, all working in numerous public and private settings, such as hospitals, medical clinics, community centres and private practice.

There are many types of healthcare, including general practice (your local doctor, also known as your 'GP'), hospitals, mental health, allied health, aged care, dental and complementary medicine, working together in two complementary streams, being public (most of which is free) and private (which you pay for).

Most dentists and many allied health professionals (such as physiotherapists, speech pathologists, psychologists and dietitians) work in private practice and in the hospital system. Pharmacists provide pharmacy services in local pharmacies, as well as hospitals and community health services.

Your GP is the best place to start if you need to see a doctor about your health. However, in an emergency, you can also see a doctor at the emergency department of the nearest hospital.

Funding and managing the Victorian health system

Public sector health services in Victoria are provided by all levels of government, including local, state and federal. Although public hospitals in Victoria are funded by both the state and federal governments, they are managed by the Victorian Government.

Private sector health service providers include private hospitals, medical and allied health practices, and pharmacies. Private hospitals are owned and operated by private organisations.

Responsibility for oversight of the Victorian health system is managed by several individuals, divisions and organisations within the Victorian Government, such as:

- Ministers – include the Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing.
- Chief Health Officer (CHO) – as well as having responsibility for a range of functions related to the Health and Food Acts, the Chief Health Officer regularly informs Victorians about issues with the potential to impact their health and safety via health alerts.
- Office of the Chief Psychiatrist – provides clinical leadership and promotes continuous improvement in the quality and safety of mental health services, as well as promoting the rights of people receiving mental health treatment in public mental health services.

Choices in the health system

As a health consumer, your first contact with the health system in Victoria is usually through your general

practitioner (or an emergency department if the situation is an emergency).

If you have a specialised problem or the doctor needs more information, you might be required to have some medical tests, such as x-rays or blood tests. Your doctor may then send you to a medical specialist or an allied health professional, such as a physiotherapist or psychologist.

When your general practitioner has to make a referral, you can decide whether to use the public or private health system for further treatment.

If you choose the public health system, your doctor will refer you to a specialist who practises in the public system and would perform any surgery or other medical treatment you need in a public hospital. The treatment will be free, but how long you wait will be based on the urgency of your problem and you are usually unable to choose who provides your treatment or surgery.

In the private health system, you can choose who performs your surgery or provides other medical treatment, as well as where these services are provided. Private services may require less waiting time for the service. You will, however, have to pay fees for the procedure. How much you pay will depend on what your surgeon and other healthcare providers (such as anaesthetists and pharmacists), charge, whether you have private health insurance and what your individual health policy covers.

Different healthcare settings

Some of the many healthcare settings in Victoria include:

- public and private hospitals
- general practice clinics
- public and private specialist clinics and consulting rooms
- maternity services, such as public and private maternity hospitals, and birthing units
- aged care facilities, such as nursing homes
- community centres, such as maternal and child health centres
- dental clinics, both private and public hospital based
- community-based support services, such as Hospital in the Home
- carers, both unpaid and professional, and volunteers
- phone and internet services, such as NURSE-ON-CALL and online counselling
- specialty healthcare professionals in private practice, such as physiotherapists and dietitians.

Health professionals in private practice

Many people have a team of healthcare professionals in private practice who they can visit for particular problems. For example, a person with a toothache may visit their dentist, for neck pain, they may see a physiotherapist or osteopath, or for weight issues, they may see a dietitian. Although most conventional medicine disciplines are regulated in Australia, the medical fees and charges can vary.

Because some areas of complementary healthcare are unregulated or self-regulated, such as reiki, levels of care may vary. It may be harder to make a complaint against unregulated healthcare services compared with regulated health practitioners.

Emergency care

Emergency care is provided in a range of settings, including ambulance services, hospital emergency departments, general practitioners (your local doctor), and community-based healthcare, such as after-hours GP services.

Hospital emergency departments

Most large public hospitals and some large private hospitals have 24-hour emergency departments. The emergency department is the first place to go if you need urgent or emergency medical care.

Emergency departments are for critical care and patients are prioritised by the seriousness of their health problem. Because critically ill patients are always seen before less serious cases, people with minor illnesses or injuries may have to wait some time before being treated.

Treatment in a public hospital emergency department is free (covered by Medicare), but there may be some costs

for overseas visitors. Private emergency care attracts a charge (the rate depends on how much the hospital charges, whether or not you have private health insurance and the cover of your policy).

Victorian Ambulance service

Ambulance Victoria staff and paramedics provide emergency treatment and transport to an emergency department where patients can be treated by emergency clinicians in hospital. Although the Victorian Government oversees the ambulance service, the service is not free to all users.

The cost of the ambulance callout also depends on whether you have an ambulance subscription, private health insurance that includes ambulance cover or whether you have a health care or Veterans' Affairs card. Visit the Ambulance Victoria website for current rates for ambulance services.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

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Department of Health and Human Services

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