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## Midwives

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### Summary

- Midwives will be closely involved in your pregnancy care, support you during your labour and look after you and your baby after the birth.
  - Victorian midwives are highly trained and must be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.
  - Midwives work in shifts, so you will probably see several during your labour and hospital stay.
  - Midwifery group practice is where a small team of midwives care for you during your pregnancy, labour, birth and after the birth.
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Midwives are specially trained to care for women during pregnancy, labour and just after birth. They help with breastfeeding and care for newborn babies for anywhere up to six weeks. To practise in Victoria, midwives must be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

Midwives can be men or women; however, most midwives are women.

### A midwife's qualifications

Victorian midwives are highly trained healthcare professionals who have gained their qualifications one of two ways. Some will have completed a three-year Bachelor of Nursing degree and then specialised in midwifery. This means they will have obtained a graduate diploma or Master of Midwifery, which takes 12 to 18 months to complete.

Others will have completed a Bachelor of Midwifery (a three-year undergraduate degree that can be undertaken by students who do not already have a nursing qualification) or a Bachelor of Nursing/Bachelor of Midwifery double degree (a four-year undergraduate degree).

### A midwife's role during pregnancy

**Midwives** will be closely involved in your pregnancy care, either at the hospital, at a clinic or in your home. During your pregnancy, a midwife will usually:

- give you general advice about staying healthy
- monitor the health of you and your baby
- check your baby's position and growth
- book tests and scans and make other medical appointments
- help prepare you for labour by providing information and advice
- educate you about pain relief during labour so you can make informed decisions
- provide you with breastfeeding education and support including choices if you are unable to or do not wish to breastfeed
- provide emotional support and refer you to additional support services, for example, social work or counselling services, if required.

### Team midwifery

Team midwifery is where a small team of midwives jointly care for you during your pregnancy, labour, birth and after the birth. They will get to know you and be there if you have complications, such as needing a caesarean. Having familiar faces at the birth can make the experience less overwhelming.

This model of care is not available at all hospitals.

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## Choosing a private midwife

Some women choose to employ a private midwife to meet their antenatal care needs and to attend the birth. These midwives work for themselves in private practice rather than a hospital, meaning there is a cost for their services. In the past, this cost was often between \$4,000 and \$5,000. However, with recent maternity reforms, private midwives are now becoming eligible to provide **Medicare-rebated care**.

Under this model, you might have one midwife who sees you throughout your pregnancy and then attends the birth. Sometimes this service is offered by a small group of midwives, any one of whom will attend the birth.

Whether you choose to deliver your baby in the private or public system, a private midwife will need to have a prior arrangement with the hospital to be able to attend the birth.

To choose a private midwife you can:

- use the **Midwives Australia website**
- use the **Australian College of Midwives website** or call **1300 360 480**
- ask your GP for a recommendation
- phone the hospital where you would like to have you baby and ask for a recommendation
- ask a friend, relative or work colleague for a recommendation.

## A midwife's role at the birth

Given that midwives are the main healthcare professionals who will care for you during labour and birth, they will be the ones who will let you know when to come to hospital and what to do in labour.

Midwives work in shifts, so you will probably see several during your labour and hospital stay. If you are in a midwifery-led program, you will be cared for by the same small group of midwives.

During labour and birth, a midwife will usually:

- provide reassurance and guide you through your labour and birth
- help your labour and birth progress by suggesting positions and movements
- perform routine checks to monitor your and your baby's health
- help you to relax and guide your breathing
- provide emotional support
- provide you with pain relief options, including pain relief medication, if required (in consultation with you and your doctors)
- monitor the progress of your labour and call for extra medical help if needed
- assist in the birthing of your baby, and call for extra medical help if needed
- assist in the delivery of the placenta after birth, and call for extra medical help if needed

If you need extra medical care, a doctor will perform any necessary procedures or operations.

## A midwife's role after the birth

Midwives will provide most of your care after the birth, assuming there are no complications. They will help you and your baby learn to breastfeed and provide guidance on how best to care for your newborn baby. You should be offered a home visit by a midwife to follow-up your care at home.

After birth, a midwife will also:

- help you to recover and provide pain relief if needed
- organise newborn screening tests
- monitor you and your baby using routine checks
- help with breastfeeding and refer you to a lactation consultant if needed
- organise for a maternal and child health nurse to visit you at home
- arrange other services for when you leave hospital
- arrange specialist care from a paediatrician if you need it

- continue to provide emotional support.

### **Where to get help**

- Your GP
- **Midwife**

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