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## Seeing a dentist or dental health practitioner

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### Summary

- Good teeth-cleaning habits and regular visits to a dentist are the best way to take care of your teeth, mouth and gums.
  - Seeing a dentist in your local area is your first step for dental health problems.
  - Dental health services include dentists and a range of oral healthcare specialists, including orthodontists.
  - Free or low-cost dental care is available through Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) for eligible Victorians. Private dentists generally cost more.
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Your local dentist is the first person to see if you have any dental healthcare problems. If you need more specialised care, your dentist can refer you to another dental health professional (such as an orthodontist) or a specialist. Regular dental check-ups will help prevent oral problems from developing.

### Types of dental health professionals

Depending on your oral healthcare needs, there are a variety of services and professionals who can help.

#### Dentists

Seeing a dentist is your first point of contact for all your oral health needs. Dentists prevent and treat oral health problems by:

- providing preventive treatment, such as scaling, cleaning and fluoride therapy
- repairing teeth damaged by decay or trauma
- treating conditions of the mouth and teeth
- carrying out various surgical procedures, such as routine extractions (teeth removal)
- using x-ray to detect abnormalities and plan treatment
- designing dentures and other oral appliances, such as mouthguards.

Dentists who are qualified to work in Victoria have completed a degree in dentistry, dental science or dental surgery at university. Most work in private practice.

#### Orthodontists

Orthodontists diagnose, prevent and treat any problems you may have with the alignment of your teeth and jaws. They do this by fitting corrective devices such as braces and plates to bring the teeth and jaws into proper alignment.

Australian orthodontists must complete a bachelor's degree in dentistry, a master's in orthodontics, and be registered as a specialist in orthodontics by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Most work in private practice.

#### Other dental health services and specialists

Other types of dental health specialists practising in Victoria include the following:

- **Oral and maxillofacial surgeons** treat injuries and other conditions of the mouth, teeth, jaws and face. These may include cleft palates, problem wisdom teeth, facial injuries, oral cancer and tumours and cysts of the jaw.
  - **Periodontists** are gum disease specialists who prevent, diagnose and treat the diseases of the tissues that support teeth (periodontal disease). If you have severe gum disease, your dentist may refer you to a periodontist for specialised treatment.
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- **Endodontists** specialise in maintaining teeth through procedures involving the soft inner tissue of the teeth called the pulp. This includes root canal treatment to remove infected or damaged pulp.

## Public dental healthcare

The Victorian Government offers free or subsidised general dental care to eligible Victorians through **Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV)**.

In an emergency, all Victorians can access public dental care in Victoria at the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne or through one of 54 community health services and rural hospitals, operating from 79 clinics.

### Fees for dental health services

How much you pay for public dental healthcare depends on your situation and the type of treatment you need. You may be able to get treatment for free or there may be a cost involved.

Free public dental treatment is available for:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- homeless people and people at risk of homelessness
- refugees and asylum seekers
- children and young people aged from birth to 17 years who are health care or pensioner concession card holders or dependents of concession card holders
- all children and young people up to 18 years of age who are in out-of-home care provided by the Department of Health and Human Services
- all youth justice clients up to 18 years of age in custodial care
- registered clients of mental health and disability services, supported by a letter of recommendation from their case manager or staff of special developmental schools
- those receiving care from undergraduate dental students
- those experiencing financial hardship.

The Commonwealth Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) provides up to \$1,000 per child in dental benefits over a two-calendar-year period for children aged 2–17 in families receiving Family Tax Benefit A. Public dentists will have access to the CDBS until 30 June 2016. For more information on the CDBS, visit the **Medicare** website.

## Private dental healthcare

Most dentists work in private practice and people often have a regular dentist who has given them dental health service for many years. If you need to see a dentist and if you do not have a regular one, it is a good idea to ask family, friends or people in your local area to suggest someone who can look after your ongoing dental healthcare needs.

### Fees for private dental healthcare

Private dentists and dental health professionals set their own fees, which can vary depending on the dentist and the type of treatment required.

These costs can be offset if you take out dental insurance, which is offered under many private health insurance policies or as an insurance extra. There are two types of dental insurance. General dental usually covers cleaning, removal of plaque, x-rays and smaller fillings, while major dental usually includes cover for orthodontics (braces), wisdom teeth removal, crowns, bridges and dentures.

## Finding a dentist

There are 79 community dental clinics located throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. To make an appointment, contact your local community dental clinic or call DHSV on:

- 9341 1000 (Melbourne Metro)
- 1800 833 039 (outside Melbourne Metro)

- 1300 3600 054 (for emergencies).

You can also visit the DHSV website to **[find a community dental clinic](#)** near you.

The Australian Dental Association website has a **[directory](#)** to help you find a private dentist near you. If you need specialised oral health treatment, your local dentist can provide you with a referral.

### **Preparing for your dental appointment**

Everyone has different oral health needs and risk levels which should be reflected in the frequency of dental visits. Talk to your dentist about your risk level and how frequently you need to see your dentist.

If you are experiencing pain or sensitivity in your teeth, make an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible.

To prepare for your appointment, it is a good idea to:

- wear comfortable clothing
- avoid drinks containing caffeine or sugar on the day of your visit
- bring a list of any medication and vitamins you are taking (name and dosage)
- bring a list of any allergies to medication or bad reactions you have had to local anaesthetics
- have a list of questions to ask.

### **During your dental appointment**

At your check-up, expect your dentist to:

- carefully examine your mouth, teeth and gums
- ask about your general health and any issues you have with your teeth, mouth or gums
- ask about your oral healthcare at home and give advice on ways to keep your mouth, teeth and gums healthy
- ask about your diet, smoking and drinking
- explain any risks associated with treatment you may need, and the costs
- let you know when your next check-up is due.

### **Where to get help**

- Your dentist
- **[Dental Health Services Victoria \(DHSV\)](#)**, call (03) 9341 1000 (Melbourne Metro), 1800 833 039 (outside Melbourne Metro) or 1300 360 054 (for emergencies)
- Australian Dental Association, call (02) 9906 4412
- Australian Society of Orthodontists, call (02) 9431 8666

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