
Specialist clinics in hospitals

Summary

- Specialist clinics at hospital provide services that are located in a hospital. This helps the service get the best outcome for your treatment and care.
 - Specialist clinics in hospitals are an important link between care in the hospital and community. They provide access to:
 - medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals for assessment, diagnosis and treatment
 - ongoing specialist management of chronic and complex conditions in collaboration with community healthcare professionals
 - pre- and post-hospital care
 - maternity care
 - related diagnostic services, such as pathology and imaging.
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These specialist clinics, which are sometimes referred to as 'outpatients', are for people who are not currently admitted to the hospital.

There are a large number of specialist clinics to help you with a particular health problem, condition or service. Medical, surgical, nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals are experts in their particular healthcare area and provide specialised services.

Types of specialist medical clinics and medical staff

The range of specialist clinics provided at a hospital is determined by local health care needs. To find out more about your local specialist clinics, please contact your local hospital or local doctor.

Referrals for a specialist clinic

Patients are referred to specialist clinics by general practitioners, specialists and other community-based healthcare providers, as well as clinicians in emergency departments, inpatient units and other areas of the hospital.

Once the health service has your referral, the specialist clinic staff will book your appointment, based on the information the referring doctor has provided about your condition, including how urgent it is. You may receive an appointment date straightaway or be placed on a waiting list to receive an appointment at a later date. The specialist clinic will contact you and your doctor with information about the outcome of your referral.

Your referral to the specialist clinic will not be valid indefinitely, and the specialist clinic staff may ask you to go back to your local doctor or referring specialist to get your referral renewed if it has expired.

Waiting times for a clinic appointment

Waiting times for appointments vary across specialties and hospitals. If you are concerned about managing your condition while you wait for an appointment, you may wish to speak to the doctor who referred you and discuss the options available to you. They may be able to suggest treatments to assist you while you are waiting to see the specialist.

Your local doctor is usually the best person to manage your health until you are seen at the hospital. Contact them if you are concerned about your condition and they will advise the specialist clinic staff if your condition is deteriorating. In an emergency, you should dial 000 for an ambulance or go to an emergency department.

Arranging your appointment

You will receive a letter or telephone call from the specialist clinic offering you an appointment. You may also receive other letters relating to your appointment. For example, some doctors may request that you have special tests completed prior to your appointment, such as x-rays or blood tests.

Many specialist clinics are open Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm and are closed on public holidays. Particular clinics may run on a specific day and time of the week.

It is important that you telephone or write to the specialist clinic if you change your address or telephone number so that the clinic can still to contact you.

You may also receive other information from the specialist clinic, including:

- Clinic phone number – you will receive a telephone number to call if you have any questions about your appointment.
- Patient identification number – depending on the hospital you have been referred to, you may receive a designated patient number. When you call the hospital, you may be asked to quote this number. This helps staff view your appointment history and answer your questions.
- A map – you may be provided with a map outlining transport options, parking, and where to find the specialist clinic.
- Patient's rights and responsibilities information – this will explain your rights and responsibilities as a patient attending a specialist clinic. It will include details about the privacy and confidentiality of your health information.
- Interpreter information – will include information about the interpreter service and a number to call if you would like to arrange an interpreter. Staff will then book an interpreter for you. Please check your letter for a timeframe for making interpreter bookings as they can be difficult to book at short notice. There is no charge to you for using an interpreter.

Appointments for people with special needs

Hospital clinics will accommodate patients with special needs when attending their clinic appointments. If you are hearing or visually impaired, or need an interpreter, it is important that you notify the specialist clinic prior to your appointment so that assistance can be arranged for you.

Changing or cancelling your appointment

If you need to change your appointment, contact the specialist clinic as soon as possible. Staff will be able to move your appointment to a date or time that is more suitable for you, although this might mean a longer wait.

Notify the clinic as soon as you are aware that you are unable to attend. If you miss appointments without notifying the specialist clinic, you may have to start over by getting a new referral from your local doctor.

If you no longer need your appointment, please notify the specialist clinic. You can help to reduce waiting times for other patients by making sure you let the clinic know if you can't attend your appointment.

Preparing for your appointment

Before your appointment, make sure that you:

- obtain any test results needed for your appointment
- make a list of any medication or supplements that you take
- write down any questions that you have for the doctor.

On the day of your appointment, please bring:

- the appointment letter you received from the specialist clinic
- any relevant x-rays, scans (computed tomography (CT) scan or ultrasound), blood tests or other test results
- a list of any current medication you are taking
- your Medicare card, your pension card (if you have one) and any other concession cards you hold
- your local doctor's address and phone number
- any medication or dietary supplements you may require during your visit
- toys or books for children who are attending the clinic with you.

Transport assistance to a specialist clinic

Specialised transport assistance can be provided for people who have a clinical need. Please discuss with your referring doctor whether you require transport assistance, and the type of transport you need to take you to and from your appointment.

Victorian Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (VPTAS)

The **Victorian Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (VPTAS)** is a Victorian Government initiative that helps rural and remote Victorians with travel and accommodation costs when they need to travel more than 100 kilometres for healthcare.

Your local doctor or hospital can help you access VPTAS forms or you can get them from the VPTAS website. For further information or questions contact the VPTAS Office on 1300 737 073 or [email](#).

Bringing someone with you to the specialist clinic appointment

You are welcome to bring a friend, relative or carer with you to the specialist clinic appointment. If you need someone to care for you at home, it is important that your carer comes with you to the appointment. If you are cared for in a nursing home, it is recommended that a member of the nursing home staff attends the appointment with you.

Car parking at specialist clinics

Patient set down/pick-up zones are usually situated close to the specialist clinics. The health service will be able to give you information about car parking and parking charges.

What do I need to do when I arrive at the specialist clinic?

When you arrive, please go to the reception check-in desk. Staff will check your details and may ask to see your Medicare or pension card. They will then direct you to the waiting area for your clinic.

Some hospitals are introducing automated check-in systems. Please follow the directions in the letter you received about your specialist clinic appointment, or ask the reception staff at the check-in desk.

How long will my appointment take?

It is recommended that you allow up to two hours for your appointment. All patients are given a specific appointment time. There may be more than one patient with a particular appointment time because there will be more than one staff member working in the clinic at that time.

Although appointments are for a set time, delays can occur. The staff may be delayed by needing to discuss a complicated treatment or diagnosis with a patient, or they may be required urgently in other parts of the hospital. Should any such delays occur, you will be kept informed by the clinic staff. Another appointment can be arranged for you in the event that you are unable to wait for your appointment.

Plan to arrive ten minutes before your allocated appointment to allow time to complete any necessary paperwork, especially at your first visit.

Will I be seen by medical students?

Patients may be seen by a range of health care professionals, including students from allied health, nursing and medicine who are in different stages of their training. Public hospitals are teaching hospitals and it is intended that students interact with patients to increase their clinical knowledge. However it is your right to refuse to be seen by a student.

Your doctor should introduce these staff to you. If you do not want additional staff present please let the doctor know. This will not affect your care in any way.

Asking questions during your appointment

If you don't understand anything that is discussed with you during your appointment, ask for it to be explained to you again. You may ask the doctor, nurse, or allied health staff questions at any time.

Medical certificates

You should ask the doctor during your appointment for a medical certificate if you require one.

How many times will I need to attend the specialist clinic?

The number of appointments you will need will depend on the reason for your referral. Specialist clinic services are usually provided only for the amount of time that you need the expert care or opinion of a specialist doctor. The doctor you see in the clinic will discuss how many times you will need to attend the clinic.

You will be discharged back to the care of your local doctor (also known as your 'GP' or 'general practitioner') or another community service when you no longer need to attend the specialist clinic. A letter will be sent to your referring local doctor or other healthcare professional about the care that you have received from the specialist clinic.

What if I don't have a GP?

All patients are encouraged to have a local doctor. Specialists deal with a specific aspect of your health for a limited period of time, while a local doctor will know about all of your health needs and is usually the first person you see when you want help or advice about a health condition. Your GP will also help you to manage your health when you either no longer need specialist care or are in-between visits to a specialist. This can be very important in helping you stay well and making sure any new health problems or complications are diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

What should I do if I have concerns about the specialist clinic service?

You can give your opinion about the care or service you receive in any part of the hospital. This may be in the form of a compliment or a complaint.

Every Victorian public hospital has a patient representative, and their name and telephone number can be provided to you by the health service. This person is your contact if you have any concerns or compliments about the treatment you received at the hospital. The patient representative will work with you to find a resolution to any complaint, or, if necessary, investigate the matter further.

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