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## Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services

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### Summary

- Asylum seekers are among the most disadvantaged people living in Victoria, often receiving little or no Commonwealth government income support. As an asylum seeker, whether or not you are entitled to a Medicare card depends on your visa and visa conditions, and these often change while your application for permanent residency in Australia is determined.
  - Refugees arriving in Australia with a refugee or humanitarian visa, or those who have recently been granted a Permanent Protection Visa, can receive some support from the Commonwealth government.
  - Asylum seekers and refugees in Victoria are eligible for most health and community services funded by the Victorian government as eligibility for most services is not determined by visa or residency status.
  - Some of the Victorian Government's programs for asylum seekers and refugees include the Refugee Health Program, Refugee Minor Program for unaccompanied refugee children and young people, torture and trauma counselling, legal assistance, and the public transport concession card.
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Asylum seekers are among the most disadvantaged people living in Victoria, often receiving little or no Commonwealth Government income support. People with a refugee, humanitarian or recently granted Permanent Protection Visa are entitled to some financial assistance and health services from the Commonwealth Government. However, the Victorian Government and a number of community organisations fund or provide family support programs and health services that anyone can access, including asylum seekers, regardless of their visa or residency status.

### Asylum seekers, refugees and Medicare and financial assistance

As an asylum seeker, whether or not you are entitled to a Medicare card depends on your visa and visa conditions, and these often change while your application for permanent residency in Australia is being processed.

Without a Medicare card, it is often difficult to access services that ordinarily require a Medicare card. You may find it hard to meet out-of-pocket expenses for visits to a local doctor or to get a prescription filled at a pharmacy.

Refugees arriving in Australia with a refugee or humanitarian visa, or those who have recently been granted a Permanent Protection Visa, can receive support from the Commonwealth Government, including:

- an interim Medicare card
- some financial support
- a free interpreter service to help you claim financial assistance
- referrals to local employment and community-service providers.

Find out more about [Commonwealth Government refugee services](#) on the Department of Human Services website.

### Victorian Government services for refugees and asylum seekers

Asylum seekers and refugees in Victoria are eligible for most health and community services funded by the Victorian Government, such as community health services and the Home and Community Care program, because eligibility for most family support services is not determined by visa or residency status.

Asylum seekers in Victoria have special access arrangements for the following services:

- public hospital services
  - ambulance services in emergency situations
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- **community health** and **Home and Community Care (HACC)** program services
- **dental services**
- **catch-up immunisation**.

### **Refugee Health Program for refugees and asylum seekers**

Nurses, allied health professionals, interpreters and bicultural workers in community health centres in areas of Victoria where there are high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers settling, deliver the Refugee Health Program (formerly called the Refugee Health Nurse Program).

A refugee health nurse will do an initial health screening and can help you to access a local doctor service (GP) and specialist healthcare if you need it. They can also provide nursing care and refer you to other support services such as housing and employment services.

To find your nearest refugee health nurse, see the **Victorian Refugee Health Network** website.

### **Torture and trauma counselling**

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) provides torture and trauma counselling. Foundation House focuses on mental health, health promotion and family and community strengthening.

The service offers free and confidential:

- counselling – individual, family or group sessions
- mental health clinics
- complementary therapies.

To be eligible for Foundation House services, a person must:

- have a refugee or refugee-like background
- have a history of torture or other traumatic events before they arrived in Australia or be an immediate family member of such a person
- be experiencing psychological or psychosocial difficulties believed to be associated with their experience of torture and trauma.

People can be referred to Foundation House from a range of sources including doctors, schools or by migrants or asylum seekers themselves.

Find out more on the **Foundation House** website.

### **Refugee Minor Program**

The Refugee Minor Program supports unaccompanied refugee children and young people from the time they are accepted into the program until:

- they turn 18
- they become an Australian citizen
- they are adopted into an Australian family
- one or both of their parents arrive in Australia to look after them.

Find out more about the **Refugee Minor Program** in a variety of languages on the Department of Health & Human Services website.

### **Victoria Legal Aid**

You can call Victoria Legal Aid for free information and advice about the law and how they can help you with an immigration problem. Victoria Legal Aid can refer you to other organisations if they cannot help you.

Call 1300 792 387, Monday to Friday from 8.45am to 5.15pm.

They can provide an interpreter if you need one.

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### **Asylum Seeker Concession Card for public transport**

If you are an asylum seeker aged 17 or older, you can apply for a public transport concession card (PTV concession card) if you:

- have applied for a protection visa
- either hold or are applying for a bridging visa
- are receiving aid from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Australian Red Cross or Hotham Mission
- hold no other form of valid public transport concession entitlement.

For further information on how to apply for an Asylum Seeker Concession Card, see the **Public Transport Victoria** website.

### **Aids and Equipment Program for people with a permanent or long-term disability**

If you have a permanent or long-term disability, you are eligible to apply to the Victorian Government's Aids and Equipment Program regardless of your visa status. The program can help cover the cost of aids, equipment, vehicle and home modifications to help you stay independent at home, be a part of your community or help support families and carers in their role.

Find out more about **aids and equipment programs**.

### **Kindergarten fee subsidy**

Refugees and Special Humanitarian Visa Holders 200–217 and asylum seekers on bridging visas A–F are eligible for 10 hours and 45 minutes of kindergarten per week for free in Victoria.

You can find out more information in a range of languages on the **Department of Education and Training** website.

### **Housing Establishment Fund and other homelessness assistance**

Asylum seekers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless might be eligible for the Housing Establishment Fund and other forms of homelessness assistance.

Asylum seekers can access the fund through local homelessness housing and support services. Call 1800 825 955 for further information.

### **Community organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees**

There are a number of community organisations in Victoria providing legal, health, financial and other help to asylum seekers and refugees.

#### **Asylum Seeker Resource Centre**

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) provides legal representation, mental health services, employment assistance, material aid (for example, food and household goods) and a dedicated health clinic for people seeking asylum in Australia.

Find out more on the **Asylum Seeker Resource Centre** website.

#### **Federation of Community Legal Centres**

The Federation of Community Legal Centres can help you find a community legal centre that provides free legal help to people who are ineligible for legal aid and cannot afford a private lawyer. This includes asylum seekers and refugees. Some community legal centres are specialists in human rights and immigration law.

Find your nearest community legal centre by visiting the **Federation of Community Legal Centres** website.

#### **Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre**

The Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre (RILC) is an independent community legal centre that specialises in

refugee and immigration law, policy and practice.

RILC provides legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees who are not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford a private lawyer.

Find out more on the [Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre](#) website.

### **Education, employment and training services for asylum seekers and refugees**

There are a number of programs available to help asylum seekers and refugees to:

- improve English language skills
- develop job-ready skills
- help find a job
- help settle into life in Australia.

#### **AMES Australia**

AMES Australia provides English and other training courses to help refugees and new migrants to:

- learn English
- settle into life in Victoria
- find a job
- prepare for further study or training to get a better job.

AMES Australia also supports new arrivals awaiting the outcome of their application for a protection visa through the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme.

Find out more on the [AMES Australia](#) website.

#### **Adult Migrant English Program**

Through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), eligible asylum seekers and refugees can get up to 510 hours of free English language classes while learning about Australian culture and customs and meeting other new arrivals, who may share a similar experience.

To be eligible for the AMEP, you must:

- have little or no English
- be 18 years or older (or 15–17 years old if you are not attending school)
- hold a permanent resident or an eligible temporary visa

Find the list of eligible temporary visas on the [Department of Education and Training](#) website.

For people with children under school age who need childcare while they attend classes, the AMEP service provider may be able to arrange free childcare. For new arrivals with school-aged children, they may be eligible for Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance. See the [Department of Human Services](#) website for further information.

#### **Centre for Multicultural Youth**

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) helps young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds by providing specialist support services, training, knowledge sharing and advocacy to help them build better lives in Australia.

Find out more on the [Centre for Multicultural Youth](#) website.

#### **Jobs Victoria**

Jobs Victoria provides refugees and asylum seekers with tailored services to help people into work. Jobs Victoria supports jobseekers to get them job-ready and connect them with employers who are looking for staff. Our

network of Jobs Victoria Partners located throughout the state ensures a flexible, local approach.

Find out more at [jobs.vic.gov.au](http://jobs.vic.gov.au) or call **1300 208 575**

### **Multicultural Health and Support Service**

The Multicultural Health and Support Service (MHSS) works with migrant and refugee communities to help prevent blood-borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections. The service helps to improve access to information, support and testing for people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Find out more on the [Multicultural Health and Support Service](#) website.

### **Where to get help**

- [Victoria Legal Aid](#), call **1300 792 387**

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