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## Types of hospital admission

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### Summary

- If you plan to go into hospital, it usually involves a doctor or specialist giving you a referral.
  - Urgent ('unplanned') admission to hospital involves a sudden health issue that needs you to go to an emergency department or call an ambulance.
  - When you get to a public hospital, you will be asked whether you would like to be a public patient or a private patient.
  - Ask your doctor about your options so you can make the right choices.
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It is good to have an understanding of the different ways you can be admitted to the Victorian hospital system so you can plan your hospital stay.

How you are admitted into hospital will vary depending on whether your visit is planned or unplanned.

### Planned admission

If your hospital admission is planned, how you are admitted depends on whether you are going to a public or private hospital, what kind of treatment you are receiving and how urgent your treatment is.

Before going into hospital, your doctor will usually give you a referral to see a specialist, and you will need to contact the specialist clinic and make an appointment. The specialist will assess you and may send you for further tests to assess your health issue, before deciding what kind of treatment you require and whether you need to go into hospital for treatment or surgery. At this stage, you will also be told how long you will have to wait for treatment.

In public hospitals, your waiting time for elective surgery depends on how urgent your condition is, which is determined by the specialist who admits you to hospital. In a public hospital, you may not be able to choose your treating specialist.

In private hospitals, you will generally not have to wait as long for treatment and you can choose who your doctor is, but there are costs for this type of treatment.

Sometimes, even if you plan to go into a private hospital, the best place for your treatment may actually be in a public hospital. This is because the public hospital may have the best equipment, facilities and specialists for a particular health problem or treatment.

Once in hospital, you will stay in a hospital ward. How long you stay in hospital will depend on the treatment you need. For minor procedures, you may only need to stay for a day, but for ongoing treatment or major surgery, you will need to stay for longer.

### Unplanned (urgent) admission

You may arrive at hospital in your own transport or in an ambulance. This is known as an 'unplanned presentation'.

If your condition is unexpected and you need urgent treatment, you will be admitted through the emergency department on arrival at hospital – this is done through a process known as 'triage'

A specialist emergency nurse, called the triage nurse, will assess your condition, provide first aid and work out how quickly you need treatment.

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You may be asked to wait in the waiting room. How long you have to wait depends on how busy the emergency department is at the time and whether there are other patients with more serious and urgent conditions than you.

### **Choosing to be a public or private patient**

You may choose to be a public or private patient when you go into hospital.

If you are a public patient in a public hospital, there will be no cost for hospital or medical services. If you are a private patient in a public hospital, you or your health insurance company will have to pay for some services. Your health service should explain any costs involved in your care.

Read more about the difference between private and public healthcare costs in our [\*\*Hospital costs and payments article\*\*](#).

### **Questions to ask before starting hospital treatment**

It is important to ask your doctor the right questions about your medical treatment so you can make informed choices when the time comes to go into hospital.

When you are talking with your doctor, be sure to ask:

- Can I choose my specialist and if so, who will it be?
- Which hospital am I going to?
- How long am I likely to be there?
- What are my treatment options and the benefits and risks of each option?
- What are the likely consequences of not having treatment?
- How long am I likely to have to wait for my treatment?

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