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## Young people and health services

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### Summary

- Young people over 15 years of age can apply for their own Medicare card and it is sometimes possible for a young person to agree to their own medical treatment.
  - If you are under 18, the law is not always clear about how old you must be to agree to or refuse medical treatment.
  - Even if you are under 18 you can see a doctor for minor medical issues such as getting treatment for a virus, cold or acne.
  - In certain circumstances, you can also see a doctor for medical advice and treatment on sexual matters, including abortion and contraception, without your parents knowing.
  - You can access a range of free or low-cost health services, including services for mental health and dental health, community health services and support services if you have a disability.
  - There are free health services available for young asylum seekers and refugees.
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There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for young people in Victoria. There are also health and support services available for young refugees and those with a disability. Young people aged over 15 can apply for their own Medicare card and it is possible, in certain circumstances, for a young person to consent to their own medical treatment.

### Young people and Medicare

If you are an Australian citizen or permanent resident, you have access to Medicare. When you go to see a doctor, you need to show your Medicare care or your parents' Medicare card. This means that when you visit a doctor who bulk-bills, you will not have to pay. If the doctor does not bulk-bill, then you will have to pay but the government will refund you some of the money.

If you are 15 or over, you can apply for your own Medicare card. If you are under 15, you still need to use your parents' card. If you are 14 or older, Medicare will not be able to tell your parents details about your medical treatment, but your parents might still know that you saw a doctor.

### Young people and medical consent

In Australia, a person becomes recognised as an adult when they turn 18. Your parents will usually make healthcare decisions on your behalf until you are 18, unless it is an emergency. However, there may come a time before you turn 18 when you want to see a doctor on your own and consent (agree) to your own medical treatment. 'Informed consent' means that you understand your condition and the proposed medical treatment, its risks, benefits and possible complications and you agree to the treatment. Find more information on the [\*\*Informed consent for medical treatment\*\*](#) fact sheet.

If you are under 18, the law is not always clear about how old you must be to agree to or refuse medical treatment. You can see a doctor for minor medical issues such as getting treatment for a virus, cold or acne without your parents' consent.

You can also see a doctor for medical advice and treatment on sexual matters, including abortion and contraception, without your parents knowing or consenting, provided that the doctor is satisfied that:

- even though you are under 18 years of age, you understand the advice
  - you cannot be persuaded to tell your parents (or will not let your doctor tell your parents) that you are seeing a doctor for advice or treatment on sexual matters
  - you are likely start or to continue having sex with or without contraception or getting treated for a sexually transmissible illness (STIs)
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- the medical treatment is in your best interests
- unless you receive advice and medical treatment, your physical or mental health or both are likely to suffer.

Your parents (or guardian) can only consent to or refuse medical treatment on your behalf if you are not considered mature enough to make your own decisions. In this case, your parents must make a decision in your best interests. If you disagree with your parents (or guardian) and your doctor about the best medical treatment for you, a court will need to decide what will happen.

### **Community health services for young people**

Community health services in Victoria offer free or low-cost allied health and support services to Victorian families.

Allied health includes services such as:

- dietetics
- family counselling
- physiotherapy
- psychology
- podiatry
- occupational therapy
- speech pathology.

You can contact your local community health service for more information. You can search for your nearest community health service using the Better Health Channel services directory. Alternatively, ask your doctor about your local community health services.

### **Dental health services and young people**

The Victorian Government offers free or subsidised general dental care to young people aged 13-17 years who hold a healthcare or pensioner concession card, or who are dependants of concession card holders, as well as other special groups through Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV).

DHSV provides services directly through the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne and 54 community health services and rural hospitals. To find your nearest community dental clinic, see the [\*\*Dental Health Services Victoria\*\*](#) website.

The Commonwealth Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) provides up to \$1,000 per person in dental benefits over a two-year period for people aged between two and 17 in families receiving Family Tax Benefit A.

See the Public dental care in Victoria fact sheet.

### **Mental health services for young people**

Some teenagers experience mental health issues and illness. Teenagers can experience bouts of depression and anxiety, have problems with bullying, peer pressure or drugs and alcohol. The most important thing is to have someone to turn to when you need help.

A good place to start is to speak to your family and friends about what you are going through. If you would rather talk to someone you do not know (or do not know very well), you could talk to your doctor or school counsellor about your concerns. You can ask for a referral to mental health support services such as a psychologist or psychiatrist if needed.

headspace, which is run by the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, offers support, information and advice to young people between the ages of 12 and 25. Visit the [\*\*headspace website\*\*](#) to find a centre near you.

If you are living with, or caring for, a family member with a mental illness, contact [\*\*Young Carers\*\*](#) on 1800 242 636 or visit the website for information and support.

For crisis support, phone and web counselling, and mental health information, contact one of the mental health support services listed below:

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**[betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)**

- **Lifeline** – call **13 11 14** for this free Australia-wide crisis support and suicide prevention service.
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – call **1300 659 467** for this free service for people having suicidal thoughts, family or friends affected by suicide, and healthcare professionals treating suicidal patients.
- **Suicide Line** – call **1300 651 251** for free and anonymous support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week across Victoria.
- **Kids Help Line** – call **1800 55 1800** for free counselling and advice for young people between the ages of five and 25.
- **Youth beyondblue** – call **1300 22 4636** for free telephone counselling or visit their website for information, resources and support for young people with depression or anxiety.
- **ReachOut** – visit their website for information, tools and support for young people with mental health issues.

### **Support services for young people with disabilities**

Young people with disabilities and their families and carers can access a range of disability support services.

You can find out about government-funded disability supports and services such as the Aids and Equipment program through the Victorian Government's Disability Intake and Response Service. Contact this service on **1800 783 783**.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a new way of providing support to people with a disability based on support packages that are tailored to your individual needs. Find out more on the **National Disability Insurance Scheme** fact sheet.

If you have been thinking about what you will do after you finish school, see the Post-school options and support for young people with disabilities fact sheet.

### **Health services and support for young asylum seekers and refugees**

Asylum seekers and refugees in Victoria, including children and young people, can use most health and community services funded by the Victorian Government because eligibility for most services is not determined by visa or residency status. These services include community health services, the Refugee Health Program, torture and trauma counselling and the catch-up immunisation program.

See the **Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services** fact sheet.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your counsellor
- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist
- Telephone helplines
- Internet forums

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