



Children – What Kinds of Health Services are There?

Key facts

The health system is complex, and it can be hard to find the help you need. This fact sheet tries to help you through this maze by explaining what health services there are for children and young people.

Who provides health care?

Usually, the GP is the starting point for health care. If the problem is complicated, the GP can refer you to a paediatrician or another specialist doctor and to allied health care providers, eg physiotherapists or speech pathologists. Specialist doctors and allied health care providers work in government services and their own practices.

What will it cost?

Some health services are provided free by government agencies including public hospitals and community health centres. Other health care providers charge for their services.

Medicare provides a payment for visits to the doctor and some other health services. However, this will only cover the full charge if the health professional bulk bills. If a person has private health insurance, this also helps with some health costs, for example private hospital admissions. But, the insurance may not cover the full charge.

It is very important to talk to the health professional about costs before treatment starts, so that you know how much it will be and can talk about options. For hospital treatment, there is often a choice of waiting a long time for free treatment in a public hospital or paying for a private hospital.

Paediatricians

Paediatricians are specialist doctors for children and young people. If a person has ongoing health problems, they may see a paediatrician regularly until adulthood.

Paediatricians can also make referrals to other specialist health services, including developmental paediatricians, who have expertise in disability issues.

Diagnosis and assessment services

These services work out if a child has a disability and provide families with advice about meeting the child's needs. These services may also assist with complex health problems.

See the [Diagnosis and assessment of a disability](#) fact sheet.

Allied health services

For example, speech pathologists, psychologists and occupational therapists. Some of these are available for free in community health centres and hospitals, and in community support teams of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC).

For children aged under 6, there are early intervention services. You can find out about these by ringing the Early Childhood Intervention Infoline – see next page.



Other allied health professionals work privately and charge a fee. Sometimes, the Federal Government can help with this where a GP makes the referral. This includes specific programs for:

- Children under 13 with autism and similar conditions.
- Children with Down and Fragile X syndromes, cerebral palsy and major vision or hearing impairments.

See the [Getting the most out of Medicare](#) fact sheet.

Allied health services include physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers and:

- **Dieticians** – advise about diet, including healthy food choices.
- **Occupational therapists** – advise on equipment like wheel chairs and rails in bathrooms.
- **Speech pathologists** – help with communication and swallowing problems.
- **Exercise physiologists** – advise about exercise and sport.
- **Podiatrists** – treat foot and toenail problems, and can recommend footwear.
- **Optometrists** - check vision and provide glasses. Eye examinations by optometrists are covered by Medicare.
- **Audiologists** - test hearing and provide hearing aids. Australian Hearing provides free hearing assessments and hearing aids for children.
- **Drug and alcohol services**
- **Aboriginal health services**
- **Multicultural health services** – these help people from non-English speaking backgrounds. They provide some health services and help people to use other health services.
- **Women's health services** – specialist health services, eg menstruation problems.
- **School counsellors** - assist in identifying a disability, and provide information about health and other services.
- Alternative treatment providers such as **osteopaths, naturopaths and chiropractors**. If the person is using these treatments, you should let the GP know to check it will not conflict with the doctor's treatment.

Pharmacies

It is a good idea to have a regular chemist. They can recommend basic treatment for common illnesses and package prescription medications in blister packs, to make it easy to ensure the correct daily medication dose is given.

Dental services

Most dentists work privately but some work in Public Oral Health Services provided by the NSW Government.

New 24 hour phone advice line

You can phone *healthdirect Australia* at any time and obtain free health information and advice from a nurse.



Ambulances

The Ambulance Service provides emergency treatment and takes injured people to a nearby hospital. Call “000” and ask the operator for an ambulance. If you are not sure how serious the situation is, it is okay to call anyway. In some cases, the ambulance service will also transport people to medical appointments. There may be a cost for some services.

Transition to adult health services

This is a difficult issue for young people with complex health needs. They may have a regular paediatrician whose role will end when the person turns 18. The role of the GP then becomes more important, and so it is important to keep the GP involved throughout childhood. Young people cannot access children’s hospitals after age 16.

The young person may have other specialists who only work with children, eg a neurologist for epilepsy and a child psychiatrist. These doctors should be able to help with transition to adult specialists.

It is best not to wait until the person is nearly 18 to start the transition process. It is better to get to know the adult medical team when the young person is well rather than when there is a medical crisis.

Transition Co-ordinators in some major hospitals can assist with organising transition. Sometimes, a specialist health service for adults with intellectual disability can help with complex health issues.

For more information

Aboriginal health services

www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/health-systems/health-workers/organisations/map-of-aboriginal-medical-services-in-australia

Australian Hearing

www.hearing.com.au/home

Phone (02) 9412 6800 or TTY (02) 9412 6802

Community health centres and public hospitals

www.health.nsw.gov.au/services/index.asp

Phone (02) 9391 9000 or TTY (02) 9391 9900

Community support teams, disability services ADHC

www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/contact_us

Phone (02) 8270 2000 or TTY (02) 8270 2167

Early Childhood Intervention Infoline - 1300 656 865

healthdirect Australia

www.healthdirect.org.au

Phone 1800 022 222 or, if you have speech or hearing impairment, 1800 555 677

Transition Care website - information about transition to adult health services

www.health.nsw.gov.au/gmct/transition

Phone (02) 9887 5578



You might be interested in these fact sheets

- **Children – signs of illness**
- **Diagnosis and assessment of a disability**
- **Finding the right doctor**
- **Getting the most out of Medicare**
- **Going to the dentist**
- **Mental health**
- **Specialised intellectual disability health services**

*This fact sheet was updated in **June 2011**.*

The fact sheet contains general information only and does not take into account individual circumstances. It should not be relied on for medical advice. We encourage you to look at the information in this fact sheet carefully with your health professional to decide whether the information is right for you.