



# A guide for patients

## Choosing a specialist



Choosing a specialist can be a shared decision between you and your GP.

### WEIGHING UP YOUR NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

**IN AUSTRALIA, SPECIALISTS PROVIDE A HIGH STANDARD OF CARE IN BOTH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HEALTH SYSTEMS.**

Although the private health system may give you more options, including choice of doctor, reduced wait times and greater flexibility when planning surgery or other procedures, the public health system also offers many advantages.

If you want your GP to choose the specialist for you, explain your needs or preferences. This will help them choose the specialist that is best suited to you.



#### FIELD OF PRACTICE

Some specialists treat multiple conditions within their field while others focus on a few specific areas. Specialists from different fields of practice may also treat the same condition. Check with your GP about how specialised you need your specialist to be.



#### COST

Out-of-pocket costs can vary among specialists depending on their fees and how much of your treatment is covered by Medicare and/or your private health insurance.



#### ACCESSIBILITY

Wait times may vary among specialists. Specialists usually take into account the urgency of your condition.



#### LOCATION

You may prefer your specialist to be conveniently located. Sometimes the same specialist will work in multiple places, but their fees may vary between each location.



#### COMPATIBILITY

You may prefer the way some specialists communicate with you compared to others. How the specialist talks to you and answers your questions can be an important factor for you and your loved ones when choosing a specialist.

### How important are these factors for me?

	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not important
<b>FIELD OF PRACTICE</b>				
<b>COST</b>				
<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>				
<b>LOCATION</b>				
<b>COMPATIBILITY</b>				

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If you and your GP agree on a specialist, your GP will write a referral to that specialist for you.

If you would like more time to consider your options, you can choose to do more research or ask your GP for an **open referral**.

An open referral is addressed to a specialty but does not name a specific specialist.

### OUTCOME FROM MY GP APPOINTMENT:

- Written referral given to me
- Electronic referral sent to specialist
- Make another appointment with GP after I have done more research

**A referral does not guarantee a specific specialist will treat you.**

## DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH

It may help to do some research before making an appointment with a specialist or while waiting to see one. This can help you to understand what may happen when you visit a specialist and how to reduce your out-of-pocket costs.

### PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE

If you have private health insurance and need specialist services:

- contact your insurer before booking the specialist
- check that they cover the services in the location and time frame you require
- check your insurance policy includes coverage for those services
- ask about 'gap arrangements' with preferred specialists

### WHAT I FOUND OUT FROM MY PRIVATE HEALTH INSURER

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## SPECIALIST'S ROOMS

Call the specialist's rooms to find out:

- itemised fees and out-of-pocket costs for treatments and services you may be receiving
- the days the specialist works
- the locations they practice at
- the expected wait times
- whether open referrals are accepted

### WHAT I FOUND OUT FROM THE SPECIALIST'S ROOMS

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## MEDICAL COST FINDER

The [Medical Cost Finder](#) can help you compare the cost of common treatments in the private health system in different locations across Australia. The Medical Cost Finder also provides information to help you make financial decisions about these services.

**It is a good idea to discuss your choice with your GP before you make an appointment with a specialist. Your GP is a valuable source of information and may be able to provide further advice. It will also keep your GP up-to-date on your care so they can follow up with your specialist as needed.**

Find out more:

- **Your options for medical specialist care**
- **Referrals to medical specialists**