

# NSW HEALTH CARE SYSTEM INFORMATION BOOKLET

## ARE YOU A NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEE OR MIGRANT?

This booklet gives you information  
about health services in NSW.



# CONTENTS

<b>HEALTH CARDS</b>	<b>3</b>
Medicare	3
Health Care Cards	4
<b>PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PUBLIC HOSPITALS</b>	<b>6</b>
Emergencies	6
Ambulance	6
For Non-Urgent Medical Help	7
<b>LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH</b>	<b>8</b>
NSW Refugee Health Service	8
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)	8
The Role of Nurses in Australia	8
Visiting the General Practitioner (GP)	9
Cancer Screening Programs	10
Seeing a Specialist	10
Medicines	10
Public Dental Services	11
Community Health Centres	12
Women's Health Services	13
Child and Family Health Services	14
Youth Health Services	15
Hearing Services	16
Eyes Services	17
Health Information in Languages	17
<b>LOOKING AFTER YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH</b>	<b>18</b>
STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors)	18
Mental Health Services	19
<b>HEALTH RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>20</b>
Your Rights	20
Consenting to Treatment	20
Your Responsibilities	21
How to Make a Complaint	21
<b>NOTES</b>	<b>22</b>



# HEALTH CARDS

## Medicare

**Medicare** is Australia's public health insurance. Depending on your visa you may be able to get a **Medicare Card**.

To get a Medicare Card:

- Go to your nearest Centrelink office, or call Medicare on **13 20 11**
- Fill out a form in the office. Or you can apply online at [Services Australia](#)
- You need to show your passport, a second form of identification, and possibly your travel documents

Medicare pays for all or part of the cost when you:

- Visit local doctors and specialists
- Are a patient in a public hospital
- Have an eye test by an optometrist
- Have x-rays and pathology tests

### What if I don't have a Medicare Card?

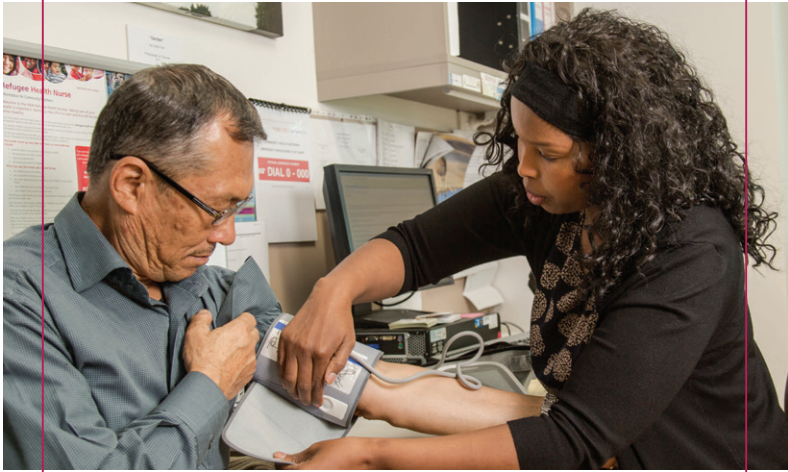
If you are a temporary resident or international student, you may need to have private health insurance.

If you are an asylum seeker who does not have Medicare and need health care, call the NSW Refugee Health Service on: **9794 0770**.



An example of Medicare Card





## Health Care Cards

You may be able to receive a **Health Care Card** or a **Pensioner Concession Card** if you receive certain benefits or pension from the Government.

A Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card helps to get:

- Cheaper medicines prescribed by the doctor
- Free ambulance services
- Free dental treatment at public dental clinics
- Free glasses from some optometrists (registered with the Vision Care program)

For more information on Health Care Cards, click [Services Australia](#).

For more information on Pensioner Concession Cards, click [Services Australia](#).



An example of Health Care Card

For more information,  
call the Centrelink  
Multilingual Call Centre  
on **13 12 02**

# PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS

If you cannot speak or understand English well, always ask for a professional interpreter. It is best not to use a family member for your health care.

“TIS” is the **Translating and Interpreting Service**. TIS is free and confidential.



Call **13 14 50** and say your language. The operator will connect you with an interpreter that speaks your language. For health appointments, ask the health professional to use an interpreter.

Doctors, specialists or pharmacists can book a TIS interpreter for you for free.

TIS is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

For information on how to use TIS, click [here](#).

You may be eligible for free document translations in the first two years of settling permanently in Australia via TIS.

To check if you are eligible, call: **1800 962 100** or click [here](#).



# PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Public hospitals are free for people with a Medicare Card. Patients in public hospitals are treated by doctors and specialists from the hospital.

There are also private hospitals in Australia, however you have to pay for your care, or have private health insurance.

To find NSW public hospital and other health services click [here](#).

## Emergencies

### Going to the Emergency Department

If you are sick or have a life-threatening medical condition, you can go to the **Emergency Department** at the nearest public hospital.

To find the nearest public hospital click [here](#).

Emergency Departments are open **24 hours** a day, seven days a week and always have doctors and nurses on duty.

You may need to wait several hours in emergency departments, because doctors will see the sickest patients first.

Take your Medicare card with you. Make sure you know how to get to your nearest public hospital.



## Ambulance

The emergency number in Australia is **Triple Zero (000)**. Use this number to call any emergency service: Ambulance, Police or Fire.

Call **000** if you need an ambulance. The Ambulance officers can give first aid, and may take you to the Emergency Department in a public hospital.

If you cannot speak English, tell the Ambulance operator the language you speak. This is an urgent medical situation, so the Ambulance operator will connect you with an interpreter.

If you have a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card the Ambulance is **free**. For people with a Medicare card only, you will have to pay.

# IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY



1

Call 000

2

When the operator asks if you want Fire, Police, Ambulance, tell them: **“Ambulance”**

3

IF YOU SPEAK ENGLISH:



Answer the operator's questions about:

- Your name
- Your telephone number
- The emergency
- The address of the emergency
- The nearest cross street or landmark

IF YOU CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH:



- Tell the operator which language you speak.
- Wait for the operator to connect you to an Interpreter – **DO NOT HANG UP.**

## For Non-Urgent Medical Help

For health problems that are not life threatening, you can get medical help from:

- **General Practitioner (GP)** in private practices are in most cities and towns. GPs at some **Medical Practices** also provide after-hours medical help. They are open longer hours and are often open on weekends. You will usually need a Medicare card. To find your nearest Medical Centre click [here](#)
- **Health Direct** provides over the phone free medical advice and information from a registered nurse. Available 24 hours, seven days a week. Call **1800 022 222**. They **have access to interpreters**



# LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH

## NSW Refugee Health Service

If you came to Australia as a refugee, or are an asylum seeker seeking refugee status, you can call the [NSW Refugee Health Service](#) for:

- Free health assessment and referrals
- Information about GPs in your area
- Help to see a GP if you are an asylum seeker without Medicare
- Help with [NDIS](#) application for those with a disability. See below for more information
- Education about health services in NSW

For an appointment  
call **9794 0770**.

Interpreters are  
provided  
**free of charge**.

## National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

**NDIS** is the **National Disability Insurance Scheme** of the Australian Government. NDIS:

- Funds services needed for people with disability
- Is for people between the ages of 7 and 65 years
- Provides support to people with intellectual, physical, sensory (visual/hearing) and psychosocial disability like: PTSD, depression or other mental illnesses

Depending on your Visa, you might be eligible for NDIS support.

## The Role of Nurses in Australia

Australian nurses are highly trained health professionals. Many specialise in particular areas of healthcare such as mothers and babies (midwives), young children (child and family nurses), or emotional health (mental health nurses).

Refugee health nurses, who work for the NSW Refugee Health Service care for recently arrived refugees.

Many nurse specialists manage their own patients and clinics, without a doctor present. Some nurses can order tests, give medication and refer you to other clinics.



## Visiting the General Practitioner (GP)

In Australia most people go to a **General Practitioner (GP)** when they have health problems.

You can find GPs in a variety of places from large Medical Centres to individual practices or clinics.

Some GPs “Bulk-Bill” which means that there is no cost for people with Medicare cards. Other GPs charge a fee as well as Medicare. Take your Medicare card to all health appointments.

Ask someone from your own community if they know a GP who speaks your language. If the GP you go to does not speak your language, that doctor can get a free TIS interpreter on the phone during your appointment.

Sometimes the doctor can arrange to have an interpreter in the room with you, if booked two weeks in advance.

When you see a GP you should ask for information about your health problem and the treatment. If you are unhappy with your GP, you can choose to go to another GP.

It is recommended that you see a doctor for regular health checks. It helps identify any health issues early, for example heart disease, diabetes or some cancers which if discovered earlier can be easier to treat.

## Cancer Screening Programs

The Australian Government provides free cancer screening tests for bowel, breast and cervical cancer:

- **Breast screening** cancer detection program is for women aged 50 to 74 years. Click [here](#) for more information on breast screening test
- **Cervical cancer screening** is for women aged 25 to 74 years of age. Click [here](#) for more information on cervical screening test
- **Bowel screening** is for men and women aged 50 to 74 years. Click [here](#) for more information on bowel screening test

These screening programs aim to find cancer or conditions leading to cancer early so they can be treated earlier.



## Seeing a Specialist

Your GP may refer you to a specialist doctor if you need more tests or treatment; for example, for heart problems you might need to go to a cardiologist. To see a specialist you must:

- Have a referral letter from your GP
- Make an appointment

Most specialists do not bulk bill, but some will bulk bill people with Health Care Cards.

Seeing private specialist doctors can be expensive. Ask your GP if you can see a specialist at a public hospital in an “outpatient clinics”. You will have to wait longer, but it is free if you have a Medicare card.



## Medicines

Your doctor may give you a prescription for medicine.

You must take the prescription to a chemist (pharmacy). Most medicine can only be bought if you have a prescription from a doctor. They might ask you if you want a “generic” medicine. Generic medicines are cheaper but are exactly the same as the “brand name” medicine. You should show the chemist your Medicare card, and Health Care Card or Pensioner Card if you have one. Most medicines cost much less for people with a Health Care Card or Pensioner Card.

If you or your family need a lot of medicines in one year, ask the pharmacist about the [Safety Net](#). It helps with the cost of your medicine every year.

## Public Dental Services

All adults who have a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card, are eligible for free public dental services.

Children under 18 years of age can access free public dental services if they have a Medicare card.

There are public dental clinics across New South Wales. The clinics have waiting lists for people seeking treatment. If you want to go to a public dental clinic:

- Call the **Oral Health Intake and Information Service** in your area (see list on the right)
- Answer the questions that the staff asks about yourself and your dental problem
- Have your Medicare and Concession card details available when you call

If you cannot speak English:

Call **TIS** on **13 14 50** before you contact the Oral Health Intake phone number.



## Oral Health Intake and Information Services

### Sydney/South Western Sydney

☎ 1300 559 393

### Western Sydney/Nepean Blue Mountains

☎ 8890 6766

☎ 1300 769 221

### South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra

☎ 1300 134 226

☎ 1300 369 651

### Northern Sydney Central Coast

☎ 1300 789 404

### Hunter New England/Mid North Coast/Northern NSW

☎ 1300 651 625

### Southern NSW/Murrumbidgee

☎ 1800 450 046

### Western NSW/Far West

☎ 1300 552 626

For adults without a **Health Care Card** or **Pensioner Concession Card**, you would need to go to a private dental clinic.

## Community Health Centres

In addition to your GP, **Community Health Centres** can help with some health and welfare problems.

At the Community Health Centres you may see:

- Social workers or psychologists who give counselling and social support. For example, for alcohol and drug problems
- Specially trained community nurses who help parents and children and older people
- Physiotherapists who help people after illness or injury
- Speech pathologists who help children with speech problems

Community Health Centres often have multicultural health workers to help people from cultural and linguistic background. There may be a small fee for some services. To find your nearest Community Health Centre, search on the internet: *Community Health Centres NSW*.





## Women's Health Services

**Women's Health Centres** give information and advice to women about many things. For example reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, domestic violence, cervical smear tests, breast checks, menstrual problems and menopause. They also have support groups for women.

To find a Women's Health Centre in NSW click [here](#).

**Family Planning NSW** is a free and confidential health service. They provide help with reproductive and sexual health care. To find your nearest clinic click [here](#).

If you need an interpreter call **TIS 13 14 50**. You can ask for a female interpreter.

If someone who cares for you, or someone close to you, is hurting you or your family, or is making you feel scared, call the **Domestic Violence Help Line** anytime on **1800 65 64 63**.

In Australia, domestic violence is a crime; you and your family have the right to be protected.

# Child and Family Health Services

If you are a parent of young children and need support, there are a number of free services that can help.

Child and Family health nursing services do complete routine checks for children from birth to five years of age. Each child has a Blue Book that has information about development milestones. Child and Family Health Centres can provide support, education and information on:

- Breastfeeding
- Baby's growth and development
- Sleep
- Immunisations
- Parents' wellbeing
- Can offer home visits

Tresillian and Karitane are other children health services that can provide support, parenting confidence and skills for families with children from birth to 5 years of age. Most services are free. They might offer:

- Parenting classes
- Residential stays
- Breastfeeding clinic
- Pre and post-natal anxiety and depression service
- Toddler and behavior clinics
- Home visits and parenting webinars

For an appointment or to find a centre, call:

**Karitane: 9794 2300** or **Parent Help Line: 1300 227 464**

**Tresillian: 9123 8999** or **Parent Help Line: 1300 272 736**

To find the nearest child and family health service click [here](#).



# Youth Health Services

In NSW, there are health centres just for young people aged between 12 and 24 years. These centres can also give help to parents. Youth health centres provide health education, information, advice and counselling. Most also have a nurse, and some have a doctor.

These services are free and confidential. These centres are:



## Youth Health Services

### Corner Youth Health Service (Bankstown)

☎ 9796 8633

### Fairfield /Liverpool Youth Health Team

☎ 8717 1717

### Canterbury Youth Health Service

☎ 9787 0600

### Youth Block Redfern

☎ 9562 5640

### Western Area Adolescent Team

☎ 9881 1230

### Traxside (Campbelltown)

☎ 4633 0880

### High Street Youth Health Centre (Harris Park)

☎ 8860 2500

### The Warehouse (Penrith)

☎ 4721 8330

### Community Health Adolescents in Need (Wollongong)

☎ 4240 4800

# Hearing Services

There are a variety of services for children and adults needing a hearing check.

## Children:

If you are worried about your child's hearing, speech or language development, please arrange to have your child's hearing tested. A local doctor (GP) can organise free hearing tests for children and young adults aged up to 26 years. These are usually done at the local Community Health Centre or at some local public hospitals.

## Adults:

The Department of Health manages the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. This program is available for people aged 27 and older.

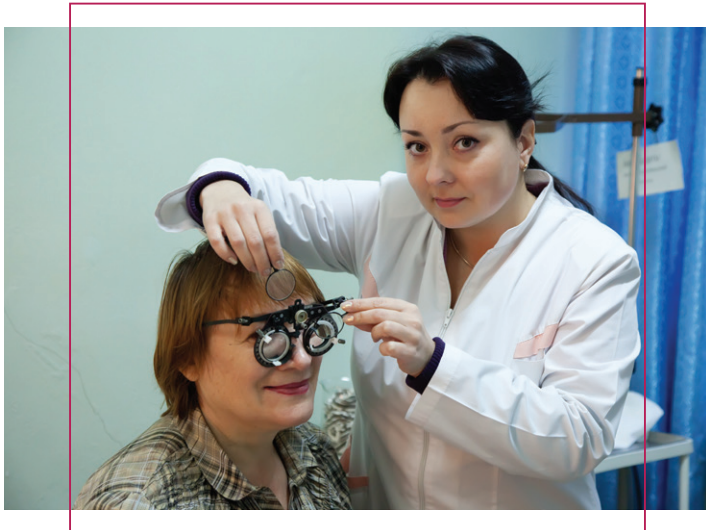
You can apply for this Program online. How to apply:  
[hearing.services.gov.au](https://hearing.services.gov.au)

To check your eligibility call: **1800 500 726**.

Call **TIS** if needed: **13 14 50**







## Eyes Services

You can get your eyes checked for free once a year if you have a Medicare card. Eyesight checks are done by an optometrist. Optometrists are located in most shopping centres and suburbs. Medicare does not cover the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

If you cannot afford to pay for glasses you might be eligible to get free glasses and lenses through the NSW Spectacles Program. Only Optometrists registered with the NSW Spectacles Program can offer this service. Book your eye test with an Optometrist that is registered if you need free glasses.

For eligibility information call: **1300 84 74 66** or for more information click [here](#).

## Health Information in Languages

For accurate health information in your language, see the **Multicultural Health Communication Service** website, click [here](#).

# LOOKING AFTER YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

## STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors)

This service has counsellors who can help refugees **and** people from refugee-like backgrounds who have suffered traumatic experiences before coming to Australia.

Counsellors are trained health professionals who talk to you so they can help you overcome difficulties in your life and make the changes you want to make.

Many staff members can speak different languages.

STARTTS services are free and confidential, for the STARTTS website click [here](#).

Call STARTTS on **9646 6700**.



## Mental Health Services

Your GP is generally the best person to talk about common feelings such as depression or anxiety. The doctor can help you, and might also refer you to other services.

Mental health services are available for people who have more severe psychological health issues. These services support people to recover and live a better life.

If you are having severe social or emotional problems, you can contact your local Mental Health Service. You may be able to see a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker who can help you or your family. Public mental health services are free and confidential. However, there can be long waiting lists.

If you need help right away call one of the services below. They are free and confidential.

If it is an emergency call **000**.

If you need an interpreter call **TIS 13 14 50**.

- **Mental Health Line – 1800 011 511**
- **Lifeline – 13 11 14**
- **Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636**
- **Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800**, for young people 5-25 years
- **Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467**
- **Men's Line Australia**, for men of any age – **1300 78 99 78**

These phone lines are available to anyone in Australia **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, and are **free**.

To learn more in your language about available services, click here: [mental health service](#).

# HEALTH RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Health workers are doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors and others.

## Your Rights

Health workers must explain to you:

- Your condition or disease
- Medical tests
- The treatment
- Possible side-effects or risks from the treatment

You have a right to:

- Be treated with care, consideration and dignity
- Have your beliefs and cultural and religious practices respected
- Obtain other medical opinions
- See your personal medical records
- Have your personal medical records kept confidential from others
- Choose to withdraw consent and refuse further treatment at any time
- Seek help from a health care interpreter

## Consenting to Treatment

You must give consent to treatments provided. In most cases this will be verbal consent. Written consent is required for some procedures, such as surgery. Children under 14 years need the consent of their parent or guardian.

Children aged 14-16 years usually give consent jointly with their parents or guardians; can give sole consent if they show that they fully understand the proposed treatment.

# Your Responsibilities

You must:

- Tell health workers everything about your health
- Tell health workers if you use medicines, alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- Keep appointment times or inform health workers if you are unable to attend an appointment, especially if an interpreter has been booked
- Not harass abuse, threaten or put any person at risk of physical or psychological harm

## How to Make a Complaint

In Australia, you can complain about a health service or health worker.

Discuss your concerns with the health worker involved in your care. They may be able to resolve your concern straight away.

### If you are still not satisfied after speaking to the health worker:

- Call the hospital where you have received treatment and ask for the **Patient Support Officer** or
- Call the health centre where you received treatment and ask for the **Manager** or
- Contact the **Health Care Complaints Commission** on **1800 043 159** (free call).

If you do not speak English contact **TIS** on **13 14 50**.







NSW Refugee  
Health Service

Produced by NSW Refugee Health Service

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✉ [SWSLHD-RefugeeHealth@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SWSLHD-RefugeeHealth@health.nsw.gov.au)

🌐 [www.refugeehealth.org.au](http://www.refugeehealth.org.au)

📞 **9794 0770**

Date last revised: September 2022

ISBN 978 1 74079 122 9