

MEDICARE

Medicare is Australia's public health care funding system. It is a high quality system which provides eligible people with access to free treatment as a public (Medicare) patient in a public hospital, as well as free or subsidised treatment on a private basis by doctors (both general practitioners and specialists), participating optometrists or, in certain circumstances, dental surgeons. Eligibility for Medicare also gives access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) which covers most prescription pharmaceuticals provided by pharmacies.

For people who are not eligible for Medicare, the private health care sector provides very high quality services.

Health care costs in Australia are comparable to costs in other developed countries. Anyone who may need to, or intends to, receive medical treatment during their stay in Australia, should make sure that he or she is able to pay the cost or that he or she is covered by adequate health insurance.

Although people visiting Australia or living temporarily in Australia generally do not have access to Medicare there are some exceptions, such as visitors from countries with which Australia has a [Reciprocal Health Care Agreement](#). These people have restricted access to Medicare.

Australia has Reciprocal Health Care Agreements with eight countries - New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Malta and Ireland. Under these Agreements, residents of these countries have restricted access to Medicare while visiting Australia.

These Agreements give visitors from these countries access to Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for the treatment of an illness or injury which occurs during their stay, and which requires treatment before returning home (that is, these Agreements cover immediately necessary medical treatment). The Agreements do not allow for visitors to access Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme where the treatment is not immediately necessary. Prearranged and elective treatment is not covered.

In Australia there are both public and private hospitals. The Agreements provide for free accommodation and treatment as a public patient in a public hospital, but do not cover treatment as a private patient in any kind of hospital. People who choose to be treated as a private patient, either in a private or public hospital, will be responsible for all of their health costs.

Eligible visitors who are admitted to a public hospital during their visit to Australia, should tell hospital staff that they wish to be treated as a Medicare public patient under a Reciprocal Health Care Agreement. They may be required to produce evidence of their eligibility. Visitors can phone 132 011 (local call cost if calling from within Australia) or visit a Medicare office to confirm what documentation they will need to provide.

Each Agreement is different from the others.

The Agreements with the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Italy and Malta provide free care as a public patient in public hospitals, subsidised out-of-hospital medical treatment (such as visiting a doctor) under Medicare and subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

The Agreement with New Zealand (from 1 September 1999) and the Agreement with Ireland provide free care as a public patient in public hospitals and subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, but do not cover out-of-hospital medical treatment.

Visitors from the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland are covered for the duration of their stay in Australia, while visitors from Italy and Malta are covered for a period of six months only.

The Agreements do not cover all health services. Some services not covered under the agreements are:

- Ambulance cover
- Dental care
- Medical evacuation to your home country
- Funerals
- Treatment in private hospitals, or as a private patient in a public hospital
- Treatment that is not immediately necessary
- Elective treatment
- Treatment that has been pre-arranged before arrival in Australia

For this reason it is highly recommended that all visitors to Australia from Reciprocal Health Care Agreement countries buy health or travel insurance designed for overseas visitors.

Local area Medical Centres:

Star City Medical Centre

Address: 40 Harris St, Pyrmont

Phone: 02 9518 6666

Sydney Central Medical Centre

Address: 191 Hay St, Haymarket

Phone: 02 9212 3953

Medical and Dental Centre

Address: Shop 41, Town Hall Arcade,
Sydney

Phone: 02 9267 5399