

your map through the health system

Health *Navigator*

the right care



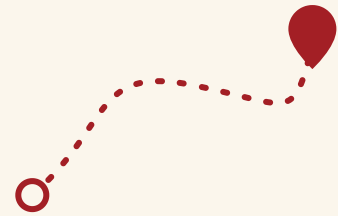
you are here

A practical guide to navigating the healthcare system, taking you from *"I think I need help"* to choosing a service, booking in, and knowing what to do during your appointment.



plan your route

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Emergency? This guide is for everyday health care. If you or someone else is in danger, call **000** or go to your nearest emergency department.



start here

How to use this guide

This guide is all about the practical, logistical side of getting help, not diagnosing what's going on with you. It will help you work out who to talk to, how to get there, and what happens once you do.

You can read this guide from start to finish, or jump straight to the section you need.

What this is (and isn't)

IT IS

- ✦ A map of the health system in plain language, so "I don't know where to start" stops being a barrier.
- ✦ Honest about the fact that the first service you see might not be the right fit, and that's normal, not a failure.

IT IS NOT

- ✦ Medical advice, a diagnosis tool, or a replacement for a health professional.
- ✦ Only for emergencies. You can use most of this for everyday appointments.



tip: keep the Aletheia **Self-Advocacy Journal** alongside this guide. The Navigator tells you where to go; the Journal helps you say what's going on when you get there.



your first stop

Where do I actually go?

Different services suit different concerns. Use this table as a starting point for your first stop.

IF YOU'RE DEALING WITH...	A REASONABLE FIRST STOP	WHY
A general physical symptom (pain, fatigue, something that doesn't feel right)	GP (general practitioner)	GPs are trained across all areas and can refer you to the right specialist.
Ongoing low mood, anxiety, stress, or "I just don't feel like myself"	GP, school wellbeing worker, or a youth mental health service	They can talk it through and connect you to a psychologist or counsellor if that's the right next step.
Wanting to talk something through, without needing a diagnosis	Counsellor	Counsellors focus on support and coping strategies, often with shorter wait times.
A diagnosed or suspected mental health condition needing structured treatment	Psychologist (usually via GP referral)	Psychologists provide structured, evidence-based treatment for specific conditions.
Something outside a GP's usual scope (skin, bones, hormones, etc.)	Specialist (usually via GP referral)	Specialists focus deeply on one area. A GP referral is the standard pathway in.
Sexual health, contraception, or reproductive health questions	Sexual health service or community health centre	These services are set up for confidential, judgement-free care in this area.
Not sure which of the above fits	GP or community health centre	They're the most common entry point and can redirect you from there.



Finding your way in

Finding and approaching a clinic

Finding one

- ♦ Ask someone you trust. A school wellbeing coordinator, teacher, parent or carer, or older sibling often already knows a service.
- ♦ Search for youth-friendly or bulk-billing services near you. Many community health centres and headspace centres are built for young people, or use the [Healthdirect Service Finder](#).
- ♦ If you already have a regular GP or clinic, that's usually the easiest starting point, even if the issue feels unrelated to what you've seen them for before.

Approaching it

- ♦ You can call, book online, or in some cases walk in. Check the service's website or call ahead to confirm.
- ♦ You don't need the "right words" for what's going on. "I've been feeling off and I'm not sure why" is a completely valid reason to book.
- ♦ You're allowed to ask questions before booking, like whether the service is confidential, youth-friendly or bulk-billed.

Quick glossary

Bulk billing

The clinic bills Medicare directly, so you don't pay out of pocket at the appointment.

Medicare

Australia's public health insurance. It covers or subsidises many appointments and tests.

Telehealth

A phone or video appointment instead of an in-person visit.

Waitlist

A queue for an appointment or service when demand is higher than availability.

Triage

Working out how urgent your situation is, often used to decide who is seen first.

Informed consent

Agreeing to a test or treatment after understanding what it involves. You can always ask more questions first.

Youth-friendly service

A service set up with young people's needs, confidentiality and comfort in mind.



get ready

Preparing for your appointment

4.1 Booking an appointment

- ✦ When you call to make an appointment, you'll speak to a receptionist.
- ✦ You'll usually be asked briefly why you're coming in. A one-line reason is enough ("a check-up", "something I want to discuss").
- ✦ If it's your first time at a service, say you're a new patient. You may be asked for your name, date of birth and Medicare card if you have one.
- ✦ A standard appointment is 10 to 15 minutes. You can ask for a longer appointment if you have more than one thing to talk about.
- ✦ Let them know if you need an appointment urgently, or if it can be later in the week.

WHAT TO SAY

TRY SAYING

"Hi, I'd like to book an appointment. I've been having some symptoms I want to get checked out."

TRY SAYING

"I haven't been to your clinic before. Do you take new patients, and is it bulk-billed?"

TRY SAYING

"I'm not sure what type of appointment I need. Can you help me work that out?"

TRY SAYING

"Is it possible to get a longer appointment? I've got a few things I want to talk about."

4.2 What to bring

☒ IDs and documents

- ✦ Medicare card
- ✦ Photo ID (e.g. student ID or driver's licence)
- ✦ Concession or health care card, if you have one

☐ Medical history

- ✦ Past diagnoses, or written notes about your symptoms
- ✦ A list of medications
- ✦ Copies of recent reports, tests or scans (e.g. blood test, X-ray)
- ✦ Family health history notes, if available

Payment

- ✦ A debit or credit card, if the clinic doesn't fully bulk bill
- ✦ Cash, if you prefer or cards aren't accepted

Notes

- ✦ A list of points you want to raise (even a few dot points)
- ✦ A notebook and pen, or your phone, to take notes
- ✦ You can ask the GP to write down important instructions

A support person, if you'd like one. You're allowed to ask for this.

4.3 Attending your appointment

BEFORE

- ✦ Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early so you're not rushed.
- ✦ Check in with the receptionist: your name and appointment time.
- ✦ New patients usually fill in registration paperwork with personal details.
- ✦ Wait to be called. Delays can happen if appointments run over.

DURING

- ✦ The clinician will usually ask questions before examining or discussing anything. You can ask what to expect at any point.
- ✦ Bring a written list so you don't forget what you wanted to say. The Aletheia Self-Advocacy Journal has a template.
- ✦ You can ask for a support person to be in the room, or to speak to the clinician alone.

AT THE END

- ✦ Your GP will summarise any treatments or tests, and give referrals or instructions. If you're still unsure, it's okay to ask: *"What are the next steps?"*



know your options

Types of services

The health system has lots of doors. Here's what each one is for, and how to get through it.



5.1 GP and general clinics

- ✦ Your GP is your first stop for anything that isn't an emergency. Find a GP clinic near you and check if they bulk bill before booking.
- ✦ Urgent Care Clinics are for issues that need attention today but aren't life-threatening, like fevers, cuts, burns, sprains or minor fractures. You can walk in, and they're open 7 days a week.
- ✦ Many clinics bulk bill, meaning your GP bills Medicare directly and you pay nothing out of pocket. Bring your Medicare card or number.
- ✦ Some clinics charge privately: you pay the fee upfront and claim back a Medicare rebate. Since you pay on the day, it's good to know beforehand.



5.2 Specialists

- ✦ A specialist is a doctor with extra training in one area of health, e.g. mental health (psychiatry) or digestive health (gastroenterology).
- ✦ You may be referred to a specialist when your health needs more specific expertise for diagnosis or treatment. Your GP will give you a written referral if needed.
- ✦ Your GP can help you choose a specialist based on your preferences, location, cost, availability and the care you need.
- ✦ If you see a specialist without a referral, you may pay out of pocket and won't be able to claim a Medicare rebate.



5.3 Community health

- ♦ Community health services provide health and support in your local area. A GP referral usually isn't needed.
- ♦ Services vary by location, but can include care for chronic conditions, mental health, disability, family planning, and drug and alcohol support.
- ♦ They're open to everyone, though some prioritise people who find it harder to access care, such as people on low incomes.
- ♦ Call a community health service directly to ask what they offer, whether you're eligible and how to book.
- ♦ Some services are free, others have a small fee depending on the service and what you can pay. Ask about costs when you book.



5.4 Mental health

- ♦ Start by telling someone you trust, like a family member, friend or school counsellor, then see a GP. Your GP can talk through what's happening and refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist if needed.
- ♦ You can ask for a Mental Health Treatment Plan (book a long appointment). It can give you a Medicare rebate for up to 10 individual sessions a year.
- ♦ You can also skip the referral: services like headspace offer free or low-cost support without a GP referral or treatment plan.
- ♦ In an emergency, call 000 or go to the emergency department.

IF IT'S URGENT, YOU CAN CALL

13 11 14

1800 55 1800

1300 659 467

1300 22 4636

1800 184 527



5.5 Sexual and reproductive health

- ♦ Start with a GP or a sexual health clinic. You can see a GP for STI testing, contraception or pregnancy concerns.
- ♦ You can go to a sexual health service without a referral for STI testing and treatment, contraception and advice. Some services are free and confidential, and you may not need a Medicare card.
- ♦ Contraception is available through a GP, a pharmacy, or a sexual and reproductive health service. There are also free and low-cost contraception hubs.
- ♦ A GP or sexual and reproductive health service can provide a pregnancy test, talk through your options and refer you on if needed.



5.6 Youth clinics

- ♦ **Youth-friendly GPs and clinics:** ask if they bulk bill before booking. School and uni health services can also help.
- ♦ **Telehealth:** see a health professional from home. Medicare rebates may apply depending on your situation.
- ♦ **Walk-in or booked:** Urgent Care Clinics are free, walk-in and don't need a referral. Other services may need a referral.



5.7 Disability support

- ♦ The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the place to start for support with a permanent or significant disability.
- ♦ You can call them or look for information on the [NDIS website](#).
- ♦ They provide different support packages, tailored to your individual needs.
- ♦ You can find more about government-funded disability supports through the Victorian Government's Disability Intake and Response Service.



5.8 Refugee and asylum seeker health services

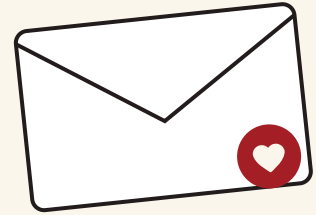
- ♦ If you come from an asylum seeker or refugee background, you can access most government-funded health and community services regardless of your visa or residency status.
- ♦ Services include community health, the Refugee Health Program, immunisations, and torture and trauma counselling.



the next door

What is a referral?

A referral is simply a letter from your GP or health professional to another one, opening the door to more specific care. Understanding how referrals work makes the system feel less like a maze.



- ♦ Referrals usually come from a GP, but can also come from a school wellbeing service or another clinician.
- ♦ A referral doesn't mean something is seriously wrong. It often just means the next professional is better placed to help with that specific issue.
- ♦ You can ask why a referral is being suggested, and what care it will involve.
- ♦ If you already have a specialist in mind, you can ask your GP to refer you to them instead.
- ♦ A referral usually includes the specialist's name, the reason for the referral, up-to-date information about your health issue, and contact details.
- ♦ Referrals can have a validity period (how long they can be used for). It's worth asking how long yours lasts.
- ♦ If the waitlist is long, ask if there's a shorter-term option in the meantime, or another service that can help sooner.



what it costs, how to get there

Cost and access

Cost

- ♦ Many GP and community health services bulk bill young people, meaning no out-of-pocket cost, but this varies by clinic. Ask when you book.
- ♦ Medicare (if you're eligible) covers or subsidises many services. A GP can tell you what applies to you.
- ♦ Some services offer sliding-scale or free appointments for young people. Community health centres are a good place to ask.
- ♦ If cost is a barrier, say so. Many services can point you to a more affordable option rather than you going without care.

Access

- ♦ **Location:** a clinic close to home or in your local area is easier to keep going back to. Check public transport options.
- ♦ **Opening hours:** not every clinic has evening or weekend appointments. Check they match your schedule.
- ♦ **Doctor preferences:** you can ask the clinic if you can see a male or female doctor.
- ♦ **Language:** you can ask for a doctor who speaks your language, or for an interpreter at your appointment.



know your rights

What are my healthcare rights?



Informed consent

You have the right to ask questions, understand what's being proposed, and say no to a test or treatment.



Consent is ongoing

It isn't a one-off form. You can change your mind, ask to slow down, or ask for something to be explained again.



To be heard and involved

You can choose to share information about your health openly, which helps your health professional give you the best care.



Dignity and respect

Everyone has the right to be treated equally and without judgement, whatever their race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexuality or ability.



Confidentiality

Your health and personal information is kept private and safe, with some legal exceptions around serious risk of harm.

you are part of the decision, not just present in the room



it's okay not to know

I'm not sure where to start...

That's normal, and it's exactly what this guide is for. If nothing above feels like a clear fit:

- ✦ Tell someone about it, like a parent, carer or trusted adult. They can help you find information, book an appointment, or take you to hospital if needed.
- ✦ Ask your GP or school wellbeing service. They're there to help you work out the next step, even if they're not the final answer.
- ✦ Say exactly that: *"I'm not sure who I should be seeing about this."* It's a completely reasonable thing to say out loud.
- ✦ Read reliable health information online. Trusted sites include [Better Health Channel](#) and [healthdirect](#).

TRY SAYING

"I'm not sure who I should be seeing about this. Can you help me work out where to start?"



try another door

If the first service isn't the right fit...

Sometimes the first service, clinician or appointment doesn't get you the answer or help you needed. That doesn't mean you've run out of options.

- ✦ You're allowed to ask for a second opinion.
- ✦ You can ask your GP or clinician what else could be causing the issue, or what the next step would be if this one doesn't help.
- ✦ You can change clinics or clinicians if the fit isn't right. That's a normal and reasonable thing to do.
- ✦ You have the right to ask for as many opinions or referrals as you need.
- ✦ Bringing a written record of what's happened so far (see the Self-Advocacy Journal) makes it much easier to pick up where you left off with someone new.
- ✦ If you had a bad experience with a health professional, tell a parent, school wellbeing counsellor or another adult you trust, so you can get help straight away.

*The first answer isn't always the last one. **You are allowed to keep going.***



before you go

Quick checklist

A one-page recap to come back to before your next appointment.

- ☐ I know roughly which type of service fits what I'm dealing with (see section 2).
- ☐ I've found a clinic or service, or asked someone I trust to help me find one.
- ☐ I know what I'm going to say when I call or book.
- ☐ I know what to bring: Medicare card, a short list of what I want to raise, and relevant history.
- ☐ I know I can ask about cost, confidentiality, and what happens next at any point.
- ☐ I know that if this appointment doesn't resolve things, I can ask for a next step or a second opinion.

Appointment

Where: _____

When: _____

Who: _____

Bring

☐ Medicare card ☐ ID

☐ My list of questions

☐ Self-Advocacy Journal

keep this somewhere handy

*Knowing where to go is
part of looking after
yourself.*



EMERGENCY

000

Police, ambulance, fire

ANY TIME, ANY REASON

Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**

Lifeline **13 11 14**

healthdirect **1800 022 222**



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Health education, not medical advice. Information current as of 2026; services and costs change, so always check with the service. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, where Aletheia was founded. Sovereignty was never ceded.