

The Australian health care system is structured under the three tiers of government:

**(1) Commonwealth Government** which has roles and responsibilities for the whole country. It supports GPs and specialists in private practice, and provides subsidies for investigations and medications. It also funds residential aged care and health research.

**(2) State and Territory Governments** which operate within each state or territory. They run the state's public hospitals, community nursing, allied health services, and public health department.

**(3) Local Government or Councils** which provide specific services in a more localised area. They are responsible for environmental control, home care services and immunisation.

### Medicare Australia

The Commonwealth Government provides health and medical services through Medicare Australia <http://medicareaustralia.gov.au/>. From a consumer's point of view, Medicare is an insurance system that subsidises the costs of seeing the doctor, having investigations performed and obtaining prescription medicines. As a consumer you should register with Medicare in order to receive these subsidies. Your eligibility to receive treatment under the Medicare system depends upon the type of visa that you have and your country of origin.

As a doctor you need to understand how medical services are provided outside of the public hospital system.

Australia has a strong primary care system, predominantly provided by General Practitioners (GPs) who operate in a private practice setting. GPs bill patients for their services, a proportion of which may be claimed back from Medicare. Some GPs may "bulk bill" which means that they will accept a lower fee that is paid directly to them by Medicare.

GPs are the first point of contact for patients. In order for patients to access Specialists they must be *referred by a GP*. Specialists may work in private practice in the same manner as GPs. They may have appointments at public and/or private hospitals as Visiting Medical Officers (VMOs) or be employed by a public hospital as Staff Specialists.

When patients require investigations such as X-rays or blood tests, a request must be completed by a doctor. The tests are usually performed by radiologists and laboratories operating under a private practice arrangement.

In Australia, some medications are “over the counter” which means they can be purchased directly by patients. Most medications require a *prescription* from a doctor which must be presented at a *pharmacy*. The costs of these medications are subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). For detailed information on the PBS visit [www.health.gov.au/pbs](http://www.health.gov.au/pbs)

### Hospital System

Australia has a mixed system of public and private hospitals. Private hospitals may be owned by not-for-profit charitable organisations or by commercially oriented corporations. Fees are charged for services provided by these hospitals. For in-patient services Private Health Insurance is usually required in order to cover some of these costs. For outpatient services, including emergency departments, a facility fee is usually charged, and a portion of the doctors’ bills can be claimed back through Medicare. The Commonwealth Government currently contributes a 30% rebate to individuals paying private health insurance premiums.