

Roles of different health professionals in Australia

As an international student, it can be tricky to find your way around a new healthcare system - especially regarding your sexual and reproductive health. Where should you go, and who can do what? Here is some information about the types of sexual and reproductive health services that Australian health professionals can provide:

GPs

General practitioners, or GPs, are doctors that are your **first** point of contact for any health concerns.

They can provide:

- Cervical screening
- STI testing (eg urine test, blood test, swabs)
- STI treatment (eg prescribing medications)
- Contraception counselling and prescriptions (eg for the pill, vaginal ring, implant, IUD)
- Vaccination (eg for HPV or Hepatitis vaccines)
- Referrals for further treatment (eg for blood tests, ultrasounds, hospitals, counselling and specialists)

Not all GPs can provide every sexual and reproductive health service, so it's important to check what your GP can do.

A GP needs to have done **special training** to provide:

- Contraception insertion (eg IUDs, implants, diaphragms and injections)
- Medication abortion
- Non-directive pregnancy options counselling
- HIV care

A standard GP appointment is usually **10-15 minutes long**. At most clinics, it is best to make an appointment beforehand.

Many doctors can now also provide appointments over the phone (**telehealth**).

GPs can practice at both private and public clinics with different billing options.

When finding a GP, you can choose a doctor that suits **your gender** and **language preferences** (eg a female doctor who can speak Mandarin).



Nurses

Nurses can work in a variety of settings such as GP clinics, sexual health clinics, community health centres and hospitals.

Depending on their qualifications, they can provide support for:

- Education and information
- Cervical screening
- STI testing, treatment and contact tracing
- Contraception and abortion care
- Pregnancy testing
- Midwifery
- Vaccination
- Baby and breastfeeding support

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Specialists

A specialist is a medical doctor that is an expert in one specific area of medicine. For example, a gynaecologist specialises in the health of the female reproductive system (eg vagina, uterus, and ovaries) and an obstetrician specialises in pregnancy, childbirth and health after birth.

They can provide **surgical procedures** as well as other healthcare:

- Medical and surgical abortions
- Tubal ligation
- Contraception prescriptions or insertion (eg IUDs and implants, the pill)
- STI screening and treatment
- Cervical screening and treatment

To see a specialist, you will need a **referral** from a GP first. Specialists can work in private clinics and hospitals. If you are seeing a specialist in a private clinic, specialist fees may be fully or partially covered by your health insurance (in which case you'll need to pay an additional **gap fee**).

Pharmacists

A pharmacist prepares and dispenses medications. They advise people on **how to use medications** (eg potential side effects, dosage, taking other medications at the same time).

They can dispense:

- Emergency contraception (without prescription)
- Contraception (eg the pill, IUDs or implants, with prescription)
- Medical abortion pills (with prescription)
- Treatments for STIs and other infections (antibiotics, creams, other medication with prescription)

Most pharmacists work at pharmacies and chemists, who usually sell items such as:

- Pregnancy tests
- Condoms
- Lubricants
- Menstrual products (eg pads, tampons, cups)

For more information:

1800 My Options

- 1800 696 784, 9am - 5pm weekdays

Nurse On Call

- 1300 60 60 24, 24/7

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Line

- 1800 882 436, 7am - midnight

Medicines Information Service

- 8345 3190, 9am - 4pm, weekdays

Better Health Channel - Healthcare System in Victoria