

Information for Local Health District staff:

Services for people seeking asylum who do not have a Medicare Card

To be read in conjunction with NSW Health Policy Directive - [Medicare Ineligible Asylum Seekers – Provision of Specified Public Health Services](#) (PD2020_039)

This updated Policy Directive requires NSW Health public hospitals, mental health services, NSW Ambulance and NSW Health Pathology to waive fees for the services listed below for asylum seekers living in the community and who are not eligible for Medicare.

This policy recognises the need to provide essential health care to asylum seekers while they await the Australian Government's decision on their refugee status. This will help reduce morbidity and disease complications, which apart from causing greater distress, also lead to higher health service use and ultimately higher costs.

Background

Asylum seekers are people who apply to the Australian Government for formal recognition as a refugee. While awaiting the outcome of this application, asylum seekers receive different levels of support which may or may not include access to Medicare. This policy applies to those who are not eligible for Medicare.

Can asylum seekers without Medicare be directly charged when using public health services?

Services for certain subsets of asylum seekers can be charged to specific programs, when relevant:

- fees for people in Immigration Detention or Community Detention should be directed to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) via International Health and Medical Services (IHMS);
- fees for people eligible for health care funding through a Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) should be directed to DHA via their SRSS provider: currently either Settlement Services International (SSI) or Life without Barriers (LWB).

For asylum seekers without Medicare who do not fit into the above categories, NSW Health public hospitals, mental health services, NSW Ambulance and NSW Health Pathology are required to offer a fee waiver.

What services are covered by the Medicare Ineligible Asylum Seeker policy?

- Ambulatory and outpatient care required to maintain health status of asylum seekers with acute and chronic health conditions
- Emergency care for acute medical and surgical conditions, including admission
- Elective surgery for conditions listed as Clinical Priority Categories 1 and 2. (See policy for exclusions)
- Maternity services, including antenatal and postnatal care
- Mental health services (inpatient and community based)

- Ambulance transport for emergencies
- NSW Health pathology services
- Interpreter services
- Emergency and episodic dental care treatment.

How to identify eligible asylum seekers?

Patients are required to provide at least one form of evidence of asylum seeker status. Transport, care or treatment should not be delayed while identification occurs.

Asylum seekers may hold one or more of the following documents:

- Bridging Visa E (with the letters 'WE' stamped on the visa), or Bridging Visa A or C
- An acknowledgement such as a letter from the DHA, the Immigration Assessment Authority, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or a Court (such as the Federal Circuit Court)
- Supporting documentation from a legal representative, relevant health service, or asylum seeker agency including: NSW Refugee Health Service, an LHD refugee health program, STARTTS, SSI, LWB, Australian Red Cross, the Asylum Seekers Centre, Jesuit Refugee Service, House of Welcome.

Health service staff may exercise discretion in determining asylum status in the absence of identification. See the Policy Directive for more details.

Other relevant resources

NSW Health Policy Directive [Eligibility of Persons for Public Oral Health Care in NSW](#) (PD2017_027)
Refugee Health Service factsheet - [Asylum seekers](#)

For support or clarification please contact the NSW Refugee Health Service on 9794 0770