

Asylum Seeker health



Information sheet 1

Asylum Seeker information sheet for Victorian health services

This information sheet aims to provide clarity to health service staff in Victoria on asylum seekers' health entitlements, housing arrangements and details on who to bill for health services. A table providing details of entitlements can be found on page 3. Some questions to assist in identification of asylum seeker clients as well as contact details for agencies that work with asylum seekers are found on the last pages of this information sheet.

Who are asylum seekers?

An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for a refugee protection visa and is awaiting a decision on this application. In contrast (and to simplify for the purposes of brevity) a refugee is someone whose asylum claim has been successful. This is an important distinction.

Depending on mode of arrival to Australia, the experiences, living arrangements and service eligibility of asylum seekers vary. Below are details of four groups of asylum seekers. It is important to recognise that individuals may move from group to group (e.g. from detention facilities to Community Detention programs or onto a Bridging Visa) and that eligibility for certain services (including Medicare) can change during the visa determination process. All people claiming asylum in Australia have to undergo a Visa Health Check, which is performed by Medibank Health Solutions under contract from the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Asylum seekers (who arrived by plane and are) living in the community

Those who arrive in Australia with valid entry documents (usually by plane) are not generally subject to immigration detention. These people are reliant on the private rental market for accommodation, and due to high costs and rental barriers, may live with friends or relatives while their claim is being processed. These people may have arrived on tourist, business or student visas, and claimed asylum after arrival in Australia. On expiration of their original visa, people in this group are typically given a Bridging Visa A (BVA), Bridging Visa C (BVC) or a Bridging Visa E (BVE). Asylum seekers in the community are Medicare eligible if they have work rights. Medicare ineligible asylum seekers can access public health services (which usually require a Medicare card) as per the Victorian Department of Health policy (see Further Reading), and may be eligible for assistance from the Australian Red Cross via the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) and Community Assistance Support (CAS) schemes (see Box 1). With client consent, medical summaries for this group should be available from previous treating doctors.

Asylum seekers in immigration detention (no visa status)

Asylum seekers who arrive without valid entry documents (typically by sea) are usually subject to periods of immigration detention. Those arriving by boat are usually detained on Christmas Island in the first instance, and then moved to mainland immigration detention facilities. These people have no visa status. While in detention facilities, health care is facilitated by the Commonwealth government-contracted International Health and Medical Services (IHMS). After release or transfer from a detention facility, clients are given a detention health discharge summary, which treating doctors are able to request from the client or from IHMS. The detention health discharge summary prepared by IHMS includes details of diagnosis, medication and special needs.

Asylum seekers in Community Detention (no visa status)

Some asylum seekers are released from immigration detention facilities into the community under the Community Detention Program. Placement in the community allows people to move about without being accompanied by an immigration officer. The Australian Red Cross and other service providers manage this Program under contract to DIAC, and provide people in this group (usually women, families or unaccompanied minors) with housing, some income support (70% of Centrelink Special Benefit) and some case management support. These clients are legally still in detention and have no visa status. Community Detention clients are not eligible for Medicare, instead IHMS is contracted by DIAC to facilitate and pay for a specified range of health services for this group. Clients in this group should have an IHMS Card. Upon entry into Community Detention, IHMS will assign a General Practice clinic located within reasonable distance of a person's housing. Each GP clinic will have been credentialed by IHMS, meaning that the clinic

has entered into a formal agreement to provide services at agreed rates, with administrative procedures in place. The Australian Red Cross, Hotham Mission, McKillop Family Services or a local service provider will arrange the first appointment to the assigned GP, and may attend with the client. The client should bring with them their Health Discharge Assessment which has been provided by IHMS. The GP manages health care for the client, and refers to other providers as required and in line with agreed procedures. IHMS will meet the cost of eligible clinical services and will reimburse GP consults using Australian Medical Association (AMA)/Department of Veterans Affairs rates. IHMS, through DIAC, has alternative reimbursement arrangements for other public health services. Specialist referral should be organised with the assistance of IHMS. Do not ask Community Detention clients to pay for consultation. Detention health summaries and medical summaries are available from IHMS or from the client. IHMS should be approached directly for medical summaries. The Australian Red Cross or other service providers can respond to other relevant enquiries (see contact details at end of document). To become an IHMS provider GPs, practices and specialists should contact IHMS.

Asylum seekers on a Bridging Visa post-detention (new BVE)

Since November 2011, some asylum seekers have been released from detention facilities on a Bridging Visa E (BVE) to live in the community. Typically, men on their own in this group are reliant on the private rental market, and receive six weeks of income, housing and case work support from Australian Red Cross after they exit detention (called CAS Transitional Support). After CAS Transitional Support people are assessed for their eligibility to remain on CAS, or may be referred onto the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) (see Box 1). Holders of this BVE have work rights and are eligible for Medicare. These BVE holders may not be aware that they are eligible for Medicare, and will need support to understand the Medicare system. Red Cross and its partners can help these clients register for Medicare and renew Interim Medicare Cards after their expiry. Health summaries are prepared by IHMS and given to clients when they exit detention. A second BVE group, made up of families whose applications for protection have already been approved against some criteria (that is, they have met criteria '1a'), are also being released. Family groups on this BVE have the same eligibility for work and Medicare as other BVE holders and are eligible for income support from ASAS. However, their case management is provided by Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) (not the Australian Red Cross) while living on a BVE (in Victoria HSS support is provided by AMES Consortium). This support is provided until their application for protection is resolved.

Protection Visa Holders (866 Protection visa)

If successful in their application for refugee status, asylum applicants are granted a protection visa (typically visa sub class 866 and occasionally other types of visas), at this point they cease to be an asylum seeker. The 866 Protection visa grants Australian permanent residence and eligibility for all the same services available to Australian permanent residents such as Centrelink and Medicare. Most people who hold protection visas are eligible for settlement support which is provided by AMES Consortium in Victoria. People who hold a protection visa are eligible for the Refugee Health Assessment under MBS Items 701, 703, 705, 707 – this is a one-off timed assessment that must be performed in the 12 months after visa grant. Detention health summaries (if client was previously in detention) are provided to the client and the settlement support case manager and are available on request.

Box 1: Eligibility for and assistance provided by Red Cross ASAS and CAS programs

Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS)

The Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) is facilitated by Australia Red Cross whose workers assist eligible asylum seekers to access financial assistance to cover: basic living expenses (equivalent to 89% of Centrelink Special Benefit); general healthcare (including access to pharmaceuticals at the HCC rate) and protection visa health/character checks. Case workers assist with referral to health, counselling, legal and housing services. Eligibility: DIAC sets the eligibility criteria for ASAS, and must approve all applications. To receive support people need to meet financial hardship criteria and have been waiting for a protection visa for six months or more. Visit the ASAS Fact Sheet for more information: www.redcross.org.au/files/20120203_ASAS_Fact_Sheet_.pdf

Community Assistance Support (CAS)

The Community Assistance Support (CAS) program is for clients who are highly vulnerable and who have complex needs. The program provides eligible clients with: complex case support; income support to cover basic living expenses; access to healthcare (incl. pharmaceuticals) and counselling; and assistance with accessing accommodation, crisis accommodation and long term housing. CAS also provides Transition Support to people leaving detention facilities. Eligibility: clients are referred to Australian Red Cross by DIAC Case Management. Clients who have exceptional circumstances and who are unable to access other support services are eligible for this program. An initial 6 week Transition CAS program is offered to people leaving detention facilities.

Key points:

- Asylum seekers do not have access to Centrelink (i.e. if a client has a Health Care Card then they are not an asylum seeker) and their access to income support is limited.
- Most asylum seekers are eligible for Medicare (i.e. those who have work rights on their Bridging Visa).
- Medicare ineligible asylum seekers are to be provided with health services (which normally require a Medicare Card, such as public dental, emergency ambulance, pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical) in Victorian Hospitals as per the Victorian Department of Health 'Guide to access to health and community services for asylum seekers'
- It is recommended that Medicare eligible asylum seekers are bulk-billed due to low-income status.
- Asylum seekers in Community Detention are not eligible for Medicare and their medical bills should be directed to IHMS and not the client themselves. Not all health services are covered: contact IHMS for advice and pre-approval.
- Some Medicare ineligible asylum seekers may have their pharmaceutical or pathology bills paid for by asylum seeker support agencies.

Table 1: Asylum Seeker eligibility for Victorian health and community services (Please note: eligibility for certain services can change during the visa determination process)

Legal status Mode of arrival	Asylum seeker Typically plane	Asylum seeker Typically boat	Asylum seeker Typically boat	Asylum seeker Typically boat	
Living	In the community	In detention	In community detention	Post-detention and in the community	
Via subclass	Bridging visa/other	No visa	No visa	Bridging Visa E	
Case workers (For community and social services, not immigration/legal services)	No formal case worker Some support from Red Cross to those on ASAS or CAS	N/A	Red Cross and other agencies	1. Men on their own provided assistance for 6 weeks after detention from Red Cross/ others. Clients may then be eligible for CAS/ASAS. If not then they do not have a case manager. 2. Families who have met criteria '1a' receive case management from AMES Consortium.	866 Protection Visa AMES Consortium provides settlement support in 6-12 months after visa grant
Work rights	Mostly yes	No	No	Mostly yes	Yes
Healthcare (Medicare Eligibility)	Medicare eligible if client has work rights Medicare ineligible asylum seekers have access to Victorian DH funded public hospital and other services	Medicare ineligible International Health Medical Service (IHMS) provide health care	Medicare ineligible IHMS pay for health services from a network of health providers via a sub-contracting arrangement Access to Victorian DH funded public hospital/other services	Mostly Medicare eligible (but client may not be aware of this)	Eligibility for Medicare and Centrelink Health Care Card, as other Victorians
Pharmaceuticals	If Medicare: PBS access but no Health Care Card ASAS clients funded to pay HCC rate CAS clients fully funded	IHMS to pay	Pharmaceuticals provided through IHMS subcontracted pharmacy networks	If Medicare: PBS access but no Health Care Card (HCC) ASAS clients funded to pay HCC rate CAS clients fully funded	Access to PBS and to Centrelink Health Care Card as other Victorians
Housing arrangement	Reliant on private rental market. Due to high barriers (cost, need for references) many people live with family, friends or with community members	In a detention centre or alternative place of detention with little to no movement outside of facility	In a Red Cross (or other agency) rented house, often sharing with other people/ families in Community Detention program	1. Reliant on private rental market. 6 weeks of initial support provided to men through Red Cross. Then assessed for ASAS/CAS. 2. Women/families' assistance to source housing from AMES.	Reliant on private rental market. Some interim housing support, and assistance accessing estate agencies may be provided by AMES

Table 1: Asylum Seeker eligibility for Victorian health and community services (continued)

Legal status	Asylum seeker	Asylum seeker	Asylum seeker	Asylum seeker	Australian permanent resident
Living	In the community	In detention	In the community	In the community (post-detention)	In the community
Via subclass	Bridging Visa/other	No visa	No visa	Bridging Visa E	866 Protection Visa
Centrelink	No	No	No	No	Yes
Funded access to torture & trauma counselling	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education (children and youth)	Eligible for government primary and secondary school and for English Language Schools	Sometimes schooling is available in detention facilities	Eligible for government primary and secondary school and for English Language Schools	Eligible for government primary and secondary school and for English Language Schools	English language school 3-12 months Access to school as other Victorians
Education (adults)	Informal volunteer run classes. Some TAFE course access – Skills Victoria	Varies	Informal volunteer run classes No access to vocational programs	Informal volunteer run classes. Some TAFE course access – Skills Victoria	510 hours of English Language through AMEP Adult education - same access as other Victorians
Public transport concession	Some access as per Concession Guide*	NA	Some access as per Concession Guide*	Some access as per Concession Guide*	Eligible for travel concessions as other Victorians
Travel overseas	No	No	No	No	Yes
Migration legal advice	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS)* DIAC Fact Sheet 63*	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS)* DIAC Fact Sheet 63*	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS)* DIAC Fact Sheet 63*	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS)* DIAC Fact Sheet 63*	RILC Legal Aid Community Legal Centres
Family reunion Application	No	No	No	No	Yes, refer to migration legal advice

* See 'Further reading' overleaf

Further reading

- 'Guide to asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria', Victorian Department of Health, revised July 2011: <http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Guide-to-asylum-seeker-access-to-health-and-community-services-in-Victoria>
- 'Guidelines for Victorian public health services in Community Detention', Victorian Department of Health, revised October 2011: www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm
- Eligibility for a Travel Concession card: www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/assets/PDFs/2011-Fares-and-Ticketing-Manual/Fares-Ticketing-Manual-Update-2011WEB-Ch06.pdf
- 'Information for GPs and health services: health information for people on Christmas Island': www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/asylum-seekers
- Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS): www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/63advice.htm
- Asylum Seeker Support Programs: www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/62assistance.htm
- Promoting Refugee Health: A guide for doctors, nurses and other health care providers caring for people from refugee backgrounds (also relevant to asylum seekers): www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/guides
- Caring for Refugee Patients in General Practice: A desktop guide: www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/guides
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship Fact Sheets 60-69: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/>
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship Fact Sheet 65: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/65onshore-processing-irregular-maritime-arrivals.htm>

Asylum seeker Support agencies and health services

Agency	Services	Contact
Red Cross Migration Support Programs	Casework	(03) 8327 7883
Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project	Casework	(03) 9326 8343
McKillop Family Services	Casework	(03) 9699 9177
Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre	Legal Assistance	(03) 9413 0100
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre	Legal casework and other support services	(03) 9326 6066
AMES Settlement Services (and partner agencies)	Casework	(03) 9926 4666
Foundation House (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)	Torture and Trauma Counselling	(03) 9388 0022
Cardinia Casey Asylum Seeker & Refugee Health Clinic – Doveton Site	Medical Care	(03) 9212 5700 Fax (referrals) (03) 9212 5711 Monday to Friday
International Health and Medical Services (IHMS)	Health services for people in detention (including community detention) and medical records	For medical summaries email: ivan.desantanna@ihms.com.au To become a provider: (02) 9372 2500

Other organisations providing support to asylum seekers: Life Without Barriers, Berry St, Anglicare, Jesuit Social Services and Wesley Mission.

For further information and up-to-date referral information visit the Victorian Refugee Health Network website: www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au.

Useful questions for identifying a person who is an asylum seeker

Client confidentiality is very important; be sensitive to your environment and take measures to provide a private place to talk. Furthermore a qualified interpreter may be required if a client has low English language proficiency. Consider your non-verbal communication and do not ask questions in an interrogatory style.

Prior to meeting the client:

Who referred the client?

Does the client have a caseworker and what organization are they from?

What is the purpose of the referral?

Does the client require an interpreter? If so, what language? Do they have preference for gender, ethnicity or religious group?

Questions for front of house/intake staff to ask clients who present without a referral and without a Medicare card:

"Do you need an interpreter?" (a phone interpreter can be organised for medical practitioners and their staff via the Doctor's Priority Line 1300 131 450; hospitals and health centres may have in-house interpreting and it is good to establish protocol on engaging an interpreter for asylum seeker clients)

"Do you have a Medicare card?" (if yes, bulk-billing is suggested)

"Do you have a healthcare card?" (if yes, this person is not an asylum seeker)

"Do you have a caseworker?"; "What organisation is your caseworker from?" (might be: Red Cross, Hotham Mission, McKillop Family Services, Life without Barriers, Anglicare, Berry St, Jesuit Social Services, Wesley Mission or the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre) (see contact numbers listed on previous page)

"Do you have an IHMS card?" (if yes and you are not an IHMS registered provider, contact IHMS on (02) 9372 2500)

"Are you a tourist, international student or an asylum seeker?" (if a person is an asylum seeker see question below)

"Do you have a letter or other identification with you to help us understand your situation?" (see Asylum seeker access to health