

Refugee oral health

Fact Sheet 1 - Identifying clients of refugee & asylum seeker background

The Policy

According to the Victorian Department of Health's public dental fee and service policies, refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to priority group access and fee exemption to public dental services state-wide^[1, 2]. This factsheet may help you identify people of refugee background, including people who are seeking asylum in the community.

Clients who are from a refugee or asylum seeker background are NOT required to pay for general or denture care services NOR be placed on a general care wait list. If the next denture appointment is not available, the client should be placed in queue on the priority denture wait list^[3].

As a *priority access group, refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to^[2]:

- The next available appointment for general care
- The next available appointment for denture care
- Eligibility and Priority Access for Public Dental Services Policy, Department of Health (June 2012)

In addition to priority access,

- Clients from refugee or asylum seeker background are exempted from fees for general, emergency and/or denture care at any public dental service in Victoria, including specialty care at The Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne^[1].

Public Dental Fees Policy, Department of Health (June 2012)

*Other priority access groups include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; children and young people; homeless people and people at risk of homelessness; pregnant women; registered clients of mental health and disability services.

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is 'someone who has left his or her country and cannot return to it owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion', as described in The 1951 Refugee Convention and adopted by Australia^[4]. The Department of Health of Victoria uses this definition to identify people of a refugee background for the purpose of priority access in Victoria^[5].

People from a refugee background might be:

- A person who has been granted a Humanitarian visa & is a permanent resident of Australia
- A person who has come to Australia on another kind of visa, including family, student and orphan visas, who is from a refugee background.

Who is an asylum seeker?

An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for a protection visa to remain in Australia and is awaiting a decision on their permanent visa status. People from an asylum seeker background arrive in Australia by plane and by boat; some arrive with valid visas, such as student or tourist visas, while others arrive with no visas^[5]. Asylum seekers do not have access to a healthcare card^[6].

See Factsheet 2: Working with refugee and asylum seeker clients for an overview of factors that impact on oral health care.



Identifying

Dental staff are required to record a client's asylum seeker or refugee status in the electronic data base – Titanium; this will not only be important for target and reporting purposes, but also for the appropriate care of patients from refugee and asylum seeker background.

A client may be categorised as a refugee or an asylum seeker – however they cannot be both. First, determine if the client is an asylum seeker; if not, then determine if they are a refugee. You may need to use your discretion and judgement. The checklist below is to assist you to identify if a person is of a refugee or asylum seeker background for priority group access and fee waiver at your community oral health clinic. There is NO mandatory requirement to produce evidence.

If a client satisfies ONE or more of the following identifiers, the client is likely to be of refugee or asylum seeker background and therefore entitled to priority group access and a fee exemption.

CHECKLIST: Identifying a client of refugee or asylum seeker background

Yes/No	Identifier	Description
Status Asylum seekers		
	Supporting documents from asylum seeker support agency	Evidence by supporting documentation or letter from asylum seeker support agency (e.g. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Hotham Mission & Red Cross)
	Supporting documents from DIAC	Evidence by receipt/letter from Department of Immigration & Citizenship
Status Refugee		
	Referral source	Referred by local refugee health, settlement or outreach workers, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services including, AMES/HSS/SGP/Migrant Res.Centre • Refugee health nurses • General practitioners and specialists • School nurses • Community health worker/refugee health worker • Peer outreach or similar sessions with refugee background groups • Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House)
	Language spoken	If your client speaks a language from a refugee source country other than English it could suggest a refugee background
	Country of birth *although some young children may be born in Australia and still come from a refugee background (e.g. parents arrived on humanitarian visa)	It is suggested that a person is of refugee background if they were born in a country or came from another country outside of Australia, with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a country of birth which has a history of conflict and human rights violations (e.g. Burma, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Burma, Iran, Ethiopia, Liberia, Bhutan, China, Somalia, Former Yugoslavia), OR • a country of transit or first asylum near to a country with prior conflict (e.g. those arriving in Australia from Thailand/Pakistan who were originally from Burma,; people arriving from Kenya/Egypt who were actually from Afghanistan/Sudan)

1. State Government of Victoria, Public dental fees policy, Department of Health, June 2012.
2. State Government of Victoria, Eligibility and priority access for public dental services policy, Department of Health, June 2012.
3. Public dental urgent denture care wait list policy, Department of Human Services, 2007.
4. Commonwealth of Australia, Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia's Response, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011.
5. Department of Health, Dental Health Program Data Set: Client Registration Guide. 2011.
6. Victorian Refugee Health Network, Asylum Seeker health : information Sheet 1, 2012.

Disclaimer: This information has been compiled by the Victorian Refugee Health Network for healthcare practitioners based on information from Asylum Seeker Agencies, the Victorian Department of Health and Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Every effort has been made to confirm the accuracy of the information (last updated 11 July 2012); please advise if any amendments are required. Please contact enquiries@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au.