

Hospital Circular 23/2009

Date Issued: 4 September 2009

Distribution: Public Hospitals

Subject: Reciprocal Healthcare Agreements

Purpose

To advise Victorian public hospitals and public health services of the current arrangements regarding Reciprocal Health Care Agreements (RHCA) and the conditions and business rules that guide the delivery of the public hospital services to persons covered under RHCA's.

Public hospitals should arrange for all relevant staff (eg Admission Officers, Medical Records Administrators, and Finance Officers) to be made aware of the eligibility of visitors from Finland, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Ireland, Sweden, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Belgium for public health services under the Agreement.

This circular supersedes and replaces all previous RHCA circulars issued.

Background

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

Australia has Reciprocal Health Care Agreements (RHCA) operating with the following countries: Finland, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Ireland, Sweden, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. A new RHCA has been negotiated with the Kingdom of Belgium and will come into force from 1 September 2009.

The RHCA with each of these countries formally commenced from:

Finland	1 September 1993
Italy	1 September 1988
Malta	6 July 1988 (amended 1 June 1998)
New Zealand	1 July 1986 (amended 1 September 1999)
Norway	1 March 2004
Republic of Ireland	25 May 1998 (amended 1 January 2003)
Sweden	1 May 1989 (amended 1 February 1995)
The Netherlands	4 January 1992
United Kingdom	1 July 1986 (amended 8 March 2000)
Belgium	1 September 2009

Overview of RHCA

The terms of the various agreements differ. In general, the agreements provide residents of either country who are visitors, with reciprocal access to the public health system of the other country for any immediate medically necessary treatment that is required before returning home. Medically necessary treatment means any ill-health or injury which occurs while in Australia and requires immediate treatment and attention, and is clinically required for diagnosis, alleviation or care of the condition.

This may occur in three ways:

- in-patient and out-patient care in a public hospital, as a public patient
- subsidised out-of-hospital medical services (exclusions apply)
- subsidised prescription drugs (exclusions apply)

Visitors from countries with which Australia has a RHCA are entitled to medical treatment on terms no less favourable than would apply to a resident of Australia.

Medicare advises that the RHCA applies to all visitors with a valid visa from each country, regardless of the type of visa. This includes students (exception Norway) on a student visa, and other visa holders such as tourists, working holiday, and Employer Sponsored Workers.

The Agreements do not cover:

- treatment for which there is no immediate medical necessity
- treatment in a private hospital or treatment in a public hospital as a private patient
- those entering for the specific purpose of receiving medical treatment
- ambulance cover
- dental care
- medical evacuation to home country
- funerals
- elective treatment
- some visitors on student visas
- some diplomats, consular officers and their families

It is recommended that all eligible visitors are encouraged to enroll with Medicare either prior to receiving treatment or as soon as possible thereafter

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements in force:

[United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland and The Netherlands](#)
[Italy and Malta](#)
[The Kingdom of Norway](#)
[Ireland](#)
[New Zealand](#)
[Belgium](#)

[Reciprocal Health Care Agreements under discussion:](#)

Republic of Slovenia
Denmark

The key features of individual agreements are summarised in Attachment 1.

Public hospitals and public health services must ensure that all relevant staff understand and comply with the obligations of the RHCA. Further information on RHCAs can be accessed from Medicare Australia website:

[Visitors from the UK, Sweden, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Malta and Italy – \(Medicare Australia\)](#)

[Visitors from the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand - \(Medicare Australia\)](#)

This Circular should be read in conjunction with the Victoria - Public Hospitals & Mental Health Services Policy & Funding Guidelines which are available on line at:
www.health.vic.gov.au/pfg/index.htm

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Attachment 1

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM, SWEDEN, FINLAND, and THE NETHERLANDS

Eligibility

Visitors from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands who are:

- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident
- diplomats, consular officers and their families
- students who are in Australia on a student visa and are eligible for Medicare.
Note: It is a condition that visitors on a student visa take out Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).

Exclusion

- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA
- visitors on a Subclass Visa 410 (Retiree Visa) issued on or after 1 December 1998 are not eligible for enrolment in the Medicare program and are not eligible under the RHCA

Proof of eligibility

- current passport with a valid visa, or
- identification showing enrollment in the home country's national health scheme, or
- Australian reciprocal health care card issued by Medicare Australia
Note: Residents of the Netherlands will also need to show both a current passport with a valid visa, and proof of enrolment in their home country's health system

It is recommended that all eligible visitors are encouraged to enroll with Medicare either prior to receiving treatment or as soon as possible after

Period of cover

Residents of the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands are covered for the duration of their approved visit to Australia.

Entitlements

Residents of the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres.

Note: Diplomats, consular officers and their families are eligible for medical treatment whether or not immediately necessary and regardless of the length of stay. Medical treatment means medical and hospital services provided under the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM ITALY AND MALTA

Eligibility

Visitors from Italy and Malta who are:

- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident
- diplomats, consular officers and their families
- students who are in Australia on a student visa and are eligible for Medicare
Note: It is a condition that visitors on a student visa take out Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).

Exclusion

- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA

Proof of eligibility

- Current passport with a valid visa, or
- identification showing enrollment in the home country's national health scheme, or
- Australian reciprocal health care card issued by Medicare Australia

It is recommended that all eligible visitors are encouraged to enroll with Medicare either prior to receiving treatment or as soon as possible after

Period of cover

Residents of Italy and Malta are covered for a period not exceeding 6 months from the date of arrival in Australia.

Entitlements

Residents of Italy and Malta are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres.

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY

Eligibility

Visitors from Norway who are:

- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident

Exclusion

- diplomats, consular officers and their families
- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA
- students who are in Australia on a student visa are not eligible under the RHCA
Note: It is a condition that visitors on a student visa take out Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).

Proof of eligibility

- Current passport with a valid visa, or
- identification showing enrollment in the home country's national health scheme, or
- Australian reciprocal health care card issued by Medicare Australia

It is recommended that all eligible visitors are encouraged to enroll with Medicare either prior to receiving treatment or as soon as possible after

Period of cover

Residents of Norway are covered for the duration of their approved visit to Australia.

Entitlements

Residents of Norway are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres.

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM IRELAND

Eligibility

Visitors from Ireland who are:

- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident
- diplomats, consular officers and their families
- students who are in Australia on a student visa

Note: It is a condition that visitors on a student visa take out Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).

Exclusion

- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA

Proof of eligibility

- Current passport with a valid visa, or
- identification showing enrollment in the home country's national health scheme

Period of cover

Residents of Ireland are covered for the duration of their approved visit to Australia

Entitlements

Residents of Ireland are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Note: Diplomats, consular officers and their families are eligible for medical treatment whether or not immediately necessary and regardless of the length of stay. Medical treatment means medical and hospital services provided under the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM NEW ZEALAND

Eligibility

Visitors from New Zealand who are:

- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident
- students who are in Australia on a student visa

Note: It is a condition that visitors on a student visa take out Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).

Exclusion

- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA

Proof of eligibility

- current passport, or
- identification showing that the holder is entitled to reside in New Zealand, or
- a current refugee travel document granted by the Government of New Zealand

Period of cover

Residents of New Zealand are covered for the duration of their approved visit to Australia

Entitlements

Residents of New Zealand are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA FROM BELGIUM

Date of effect

This agreement takes effect from 1 September 2009.

Eligibility

Visitors from Belgium who are:

- insured for health benefits under the compulsory health care insurance of the home country (Belgium) and
- lawfully present in Australia but not ordinarily resident, or
- students who are in Australia on a student visa (and accompanying family members)

Exclusion

- visitors entering specifically for the purpose of treatment unless that person is a member of the crew or passenger on any ship, vessel or aircraft travelling to, leaving from, or diverted to Australia and the need for the treatment arose during the voyage or flight
- visitors who elect to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital (or as a private patient in a private hospital) for medically necessary treatment, are not eligible under the RHCA

Proof of eligibility

- Australian reciprocal health care card issued by Medicare Australia, or
- current passport, and
- evidence of eligibility for compulsory health insurance in Belgium

Period of cover

Residents of Belgium are covered for the duration of their approved visit to Australia

Entitlements

Residents of Belgium are entitled to the following for any ill-health or injury requiring treatment that is **medically necessary** and which occurred while in Australia:

- free treatment as a **public** in-patient or outpatient in a public hospital
- subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements under discussion

Australia and the Republic of Slovenia

On 11 March 2009, the governments of Australia and the Republic of Slovenia signed an agreement on the provision of health care to eligible visitors from each other's country. The agreement is likely to come into force during early 2010. The eligibility for and entitlement to health services is similar to the RHCA signed between Australia and the Kingdom of Belgium.

Australia and Denmark

The Governments of Australia and Denmark are in discussion on the provision of health care to eligible visitors from each other's country.