

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:

General Practitioner (GP)

GPs are doctors that are your **first** point of contact for any health concerns. They provide:

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

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

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

A standard GP appointment is usually 10-15 minutes long. For some services, you may need a longer appointment (eg IUD insertion or medical abortion). Many doctors can also provide some appointments over the phone (**telehealth**). At most clinics, it is best to make an appointment beforehand.

Different GPs clinics have different **billing options**. You may have to pay an upfront cost, and see if your private health insurance can reimburse you.

You can ask for 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 may be able to provide:

- Education and information
- Cervical screening
- STI testing, treatment, 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**).

Counsellors

Lots of different health professionals can provide counselling, such as GPs, psychologists, social workers or mental health nurses. With a professional counsellor, you can discuss topics such as:

- What to do with an unplanned pregnancy
- Sexual pain, anxiety or trauma
- Intimate and sexual relationships
- Adjusting to an STI diagnosis
- Depression and anxiety during and after your pregnancy
- Your sexuality or gender identity

Pharmacists

A pharmacist prepares and dispenses medications. They advise people on **how to use medications** (eg potential side effects, dosage, if you are taking other medications).

For most medications, you will need a **script**:

- Contraception (eg the pill, IUDs)
- Medical abortion pills
- Treatments for STIs (eg antibiotics)

Some medications **do not require a script**:

- Emergency contraception
- Anti-fungal treatments for thrush

Pharmacies and chemists will also usually sell items such as:

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

Private day clinics

There are private day clinics providing various sexual and reproductive health services, such as surgical abortions and IUD insertions. These clinics will employ a variety of different health professionals.

For more information:

1800 My Options: 1800 696 784 + webchat
Weekdays, 9am - 5pm

Nurse On Call: 1300 60 60 24
24/7

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Line: 1800 882 436
7am - midnight

Medicines Information Service: 8345 3190
Weekdays, 9am - 4pm