

## Eligibility for Public Dental Services

**Summary** This Policy Directive outlines eligibility for access to general dental services delivered by NSW Health through Oral Health Services within Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks, prioritising vulnerable groups and priority populations.

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**Distributed to** Ministry of Health, Public Health System, Divisions of General Practice, Government Medical Officers, NSW Ambulance Service, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Tertiary Education Institutes

**Audience** Administration;Clinical dental staff;Allied Health Staff

## Eligibility for Public Dental Services

### Policy Statement

NSW Health delivers general dental care to eligible individuals via Oral Health Services within Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks.

This Policy Directive establishes the eligibility and prioritisation requirements for access to these services, to support equitable access and prioritise vulnerable groups and priority populations.

### Summary of Policy Requirements

#### Eligibility for access to public dental services

Patients who meet the eligibility criteria can access free general dental treatment from public dental services in NSW subject to the patient prioritisation and waitlisting procedures set out in the NSW Health Policy Directive *Oral Health Access* ([PD2024\\_034](#)).

**For an adult (18 years of age or older)** to access public dental services, they must be a resident of NSW, eligible for Medicare and hold, or be listed as a dependent on one of the following valid Australian Government concession cards:

- Health Care Card
- Pensioner Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (not the NSW State Seniors Card).

**For a child or young person (under 18 years of age)** to access public dental services, they must be a resident of NSW, eligible for Medicare and their parent/guardian must sign the [Child Dental Benefits Schedule](#) (CDBS) Bulk Billing Patient Consent Form. If a child is not eligible for CDBS or has exhausted their CDBS benefit, the parent/guardian is still required to sign the form.

Patients are required to show proof of eligibility and identification on arrival at a public dental clinic.

#### Priority groups, exceptions and referral pathways

**Adults and young people in custody**, may access public dental services through the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network or via referral to a Local Health District.

All **Stolen Generations Survivors** are eligible for prioritised access to care by a public dental service when referred by a recognised Stolen Generations Organisation.

Referral pathways may exist between Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and Local Health Districts. Eligibility may be extended by the Local Health District Oral Health Director, Manager or delegate.

Exceptions can be made to provide emergency or urgent dental care for people unable to prove eligibility such as **people experiencing homelessness** or **people seeking asylum**.

**Public Dental Specialist Services** may have different eligibility criteria. Refer to the NSW Health Policy Directive *Specialist Oral Health Access* ([PD2026\\_016](#)) for more information.

### **Student dental practitioners**

NSW Public Dental Services provide training facilities for student dental practitioners, including dentistry and oral health therapy students, in clinics across the state. **Student dental practitioners** provide treatment under the supervision of a registered dental practitioner. Patients will be informed if their treatment is to be provided by a student dental practitioner.

### Revision History

| Version                     | Approved By                                                                    | Amendment Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PD2026_023<br>April-2026    | Deputy Secretary,<br>Population and Public<br>Health & Chief Health<br>Officer | Added the definitions “dental practitioner” and “student dental practitioner”.<br>Clarified supervision arrangements for student dental practitioners providing treatment in NSW Health facilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| PD2025_030<br>July-2025     | Deputy Secretary,<br>Population and Public<br>Health & Chief Health<br>Officer | Updated links and wording.<br>This Policy Directive has been revised to include all Stolen Generations Survivors to receive prioritised access to public dental care when referred by a Stolen Generations Organisation.<br>This Policy Directive has also been revised to include wording that requires a parent/guardian to sign the Child Dental Benefits Schedule Bulk Billing Patient Consent Form for their child to access public dental services. |
| PD2017_027<br>August-2017   | Deputy Secretary,<br>Population and Public<br>Health                           | Replaces PD2016_050.<br>The policy directive has been revised to include wording that supports the expectation that NSW Health requires that a Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) Bulk Billing Patient Consent Form is completed for children aged 2-17 years.                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| PD2016_050<br>October-2016  | DD-G Population Health                                                         | Replaces PD2009_074.<br>Updated links and wording. Simplification of Section 5.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| PD2009_074<br>October-2009  | Acting DD-G Population<br>Health                                               | Replaces PD2008_066.<br>Alterations to wording in order to clarify eligibility criteria.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| PD2008_066<br>November-2008 | DD-G Population Health                                                         | Rescinded PD2005_171.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| PD2005_171<br>January-2005  | Director-General                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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## 1. Background

### 1.1. About this document

NSW Health provides general dental services to eligible patients through Local Health District Oral Health Services and Specialty Networks. This Policy Directive ensures that the delivery of dental services is targeted towards priority populations, vulnerable groups, and patients most in need of public oral health care.

The NSW Health Policy Directive *Oral Health Access* ([PD2024\\_034](#)) outlines how patients are prioritised for dental care to ensure all patients are seen in a timely manner.

Eligibility requirements for specialist services may be different to general dental services. For information on specialist eligibility, refer to the NSW Health Policy Directive *Specialist Oral Health Access* ([PD2026\\_016](#)) and the NSW Health [NSW public dental services](#) website.

### 1.2. Key definitions

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dental Practitioner</b>         | A qualified clinician registered with the Dental Board of Australia in the appropriate division (general dentist, dental therapist, dental hygienist, oral health therapist, dental prosthetist, specialist dentist).                |
| <b>Episodic Course of Care</b>     | Limited course of care provided with the intent of only addressing a specific, clinically urgent patient presentation.                                                                                                               |
| <b>Public Dental Services</b>      | Publicly funded dental services provided through Local Health District Oral Health Services or Specialty Networks.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Stolen Generations</b>          | A period in Australia's history where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families through government policies. This happened from the mid-1800s to the 1970s.                                    |
| <b>Student Dental Practitioner</b> | A university student enrolled in a qualification leading to registration as a dental practitioner. All care is delivered under the supervision of a dental practitioner, as defined above, within the appropriate scope of practice. |

## 2. Eligibility criteria to access public dental services

Patients who meet the eligibility criteria can access dental treatment from public dental services in NSW.

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## 2.1. Adults (18 years of age or older)

To be eligible for public dental services, an adult must:

- be a resident of NSW
- be eligible for Medicare, and
- hold, or be listed as a dependent on, one of the following valid Australian Government concession cards:
  - Health Care Card
  - Pensioner Concession Card
  - Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

*Note that holders of the State Seniors Card are not eligible for care unless they also hold one of the other concession cards listed above.*

Patients will be requested to show a valid concession card at each visit.

## 2.2. Children and young people (under 18 years of age)

A child or young person must:

- be a resident of NSW
- be eligible for Medicare, and
- have their parent/guardian sign the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) Bulk Billing Patient Consent Form.

If a child is not eligible for CDBS or has exhausted their CDBS benefit, the parent/guardian is still required to sign the form. More information about CDBS is available on the Services Australia [Child Dental Benefits Schedule](#) website and NSW Health [Child Dental Benefits Schedule \(CDBS\)](#) website.

## 2.3. People in custody

Adults and young people in custody within NSW publicly operated Correctional or Youth Justice Centres, and forensic patients of the Forensic Hospital, may access public dental services through the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network or via referral to a Local Health District.

## 2.4. Stolen Generations Survivors

All Stolen Generations Survivors are eligible for prioritised access to care by a public dental service when referred by a recognised Stolen Generations Organisation. Proof of eligibility is not required.

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## **2.5. Additional arrangements**

### ***Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation arrangements with Local Health Districts***

Where partnerships exist between Oral Health Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations or Local Health District Aboriginal Health Services, Local Health Districts may extend eligibility at the discretion of the Local Health District Oral Health Director, Manager, or delegate.

Such arrangements must be clearly documented in Service Agreements and/or Program documents.

### ***People outside their Local Health District of residence***

Patients will be treated in the Local Health District in which they reside. Eligible patients experiencing a dental emergency or an urgent dental problem – defined as Code 1 or 2 under the NSW Health Policy Directive *Oral Health Access* ([PD2024\\_034](#)) – while outside of their Local Health District of residence, must be provided with an episodic course of care where necessary. Appropriate arrangements for follow-up must also be made.

Inter-district arrangements can be considered for patients living near the border of another Local Health District.

## **3. Proof of eligibility**

Local Health Districts require patients to provide proof of eligibility at presentation, including a valid Medicare card and/or concession card. Digital versions available via myGov or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app may be accepted.

### **3.1. Identification documents**

NSW Health staff will request patients bring identification documents, such as:

- Secondary identification – for example, current or recently expired (within 2 years) driver's licence or NSW Photo Card.
- For people experiencing homelessness, a formal letter from a recognised homelessness agency is acceptable.

## **4. Exceptions**

### **4.1. Asylum Seekers**

Patients seeking asylum on humanitarian grounds who are unable to prove eligibility, may be provided an episodic course of emergency or urgent dental care at the discretion of the Local Health District Oral Health Director, Manager or delegate. Further treatment needs may also be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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The person must be referred to the Oral Health Service by a recognised agency. Proof of eligibility is not required.

#### **4.2. Patients experiencing homelessness**

Patients experiencing homelessness may be provided an episodic course of emergency or urgent care at the discretion of the Local Health District Oral Health Director, Manager or delegate.

People experiencing homelessness can self-refer or provide a formal letter of identification from a recognised homelessness agency.

#### **4.3. Exceptional circumstances**

In exceptional cases, an episodic course of care may be provided for patients with a confirmed dental emergency at the discretion of the Local Health District/Specialty Network Oral Health Director, Manager or delegate.

### **5. Inpatients and emergency access**

Public hospital inpatients are not automatically eligible for public dental services.

Normal eligibility criteria apply unless the oral health treatment is:

- a confirmed emergency, or
- an essential part of the patient's surgical or medical management.

### **6. Specialist services**

Different eligibility criteria may apply for specialist public dental services. Refer to the NSW Health Policy Directive *Specialist Oral Health Access* ([PD2026\\_016](#)) and NSW Health [NSW public dental services](#) website for more information.

### **7. Provision of dental care by students**

NSW Public Dental Services provide training facilities for student dental practitioners, including dentistry and oral health therapy students, in clinics across the state.

Student dental practitioners provide treatment under the supervision of a registered dental practitioner. Patients will be informed if their treatment is to be provided by a student dental practitioner.

Students are allocated patients based on their skill level and the needs of the patient. Patients receiving public dental services are not entitled to select their treatment provider.