

Using healthcare services in the community

He mahi tikanga oranga mo te kātoa

Community healthcare and general practices

Knowing what is available and what to expect may help you to get the best from your care.

There may be differences in processes from one community healthcare service to the next, as each service does things in its own way to support its community.

The range and nature of services may also differ depending on where you live.

If you have specific questions, we suggest you contact the community healthcare service directly.

What is community healthcare?

These are services that are provided in the community and not in a hospital. Usually, these services are overseen by a Primary Health Organisation (PHO), and are provided through a general practice setting.

This includes services for diagnosis and treatment, referrals to specialists or hospital care, health education, counselling, testing, screening, and prevention.

Some services are also available outside a PHO, and usually these are provided by Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and individuals working in communities.

These services include home and community support, personal cares, district nursing, mental health support, and other specialist care.

Some community healthcare services may have additional costs and some may be income tested and subsidised.

If you are concerned about the cost, you should talk directly with your healthcare provider about your situation.

What are Māori health providers?

There are a number of Māori health providers across New Zealand.

Māori health providers deliver services in an appropriate and sensitive way that is culturally specific to Māori. While these healthcare providers predominantly deliver services to Māori clients, they are available to everyone.

Support needs

If you need support when you are using a community healthcare service, you are entitled to have your support needs met.

For example:

- access to a New Zealand Sign Language interpreter
- having information written down to help you understand it better
- support to access services and make decisions.

You can also ask for healthcare professionals who are the same gender as you, or to have a chaperone present for consultations and tests.

You may find it useful to have a My Health Passport booklet on hand to help with communication and to hold information about your support needs.

General practice (doctor) settings

Most general practices have regular opening hours. If you need to see someone outside these hours, there are some local after-hours and urgent care services available.

You should contact your general practice for information on how to reach an after-hours service, or you can call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for advice on what to do and where to go for help.

In an emergency situation, you should dial 111 for ambulance services or go to your nearest emergency department.

A number of different healthcare professionals work in general practices, each with different roles. These can include doctors, nurses, and pharmacists.

Remember that:

- general practices can get busy and you may have to wait some time when booking an appointment
- you may not be able to see the same person every time, so it is important that you follow up on any tests or referrals you have been given.

Depending on the reason for your consultation, you may be able to see a nurse or a pharmacist (see pharmacy leaflet) instead of a doctor.

Doctors and nurses

General practitioners (GPs) are doctors who care for, diagnose, and treat people in the community.

Nurse practitioners (NPs) in general practices have had extra training to provide some of the same services as GPs.

They can both:

- provide consultation, examination, and treatment, and advice on health care and prevention of illnesses
- prescribe and administer medications, including vaccinations
- refer you to other services
- screen at-risk groups for diseases like cervical cancer and diabetes.

Practice nurses and nurse prescribers can also work in general practices. What each nurse can do depends on their training.

A practice nurse can:

- assess and diagnose
- order tests
- provide education on particular conditions.

Nurse prescribers can:

- screen
- vaccinate
- prescribe some common medicines and provide ongoing treatment for long-term health conditions.

For further information about your rights when accessing health or disability services, or to raise your concerns about the service you received, please contact:

The Nationwide Health & Disability Advocacy Service

- Free phone: 0800 555 050
- Email: advocacy@advocacy.org.nz
- Website: www.advocacy.org.nz

The Health and Disability Commissioner

- Postal address: PO BOX 1791, Auckland, 1140
- Auckland: (09) 373 1060; Wellington: (04) 494 7900
- National freephone: 0800 11 22 33
- Email: hdc@hdc.org.nz
- Website: www.hdc.org.nz