



Migrant Health Guide

When should I go to hospital?

Can I get an interpreter?

How do I see a doctor?

Where do I go in an emergency?

How do prescriptions work?



Ballarat, Australia June 2026

Introduction

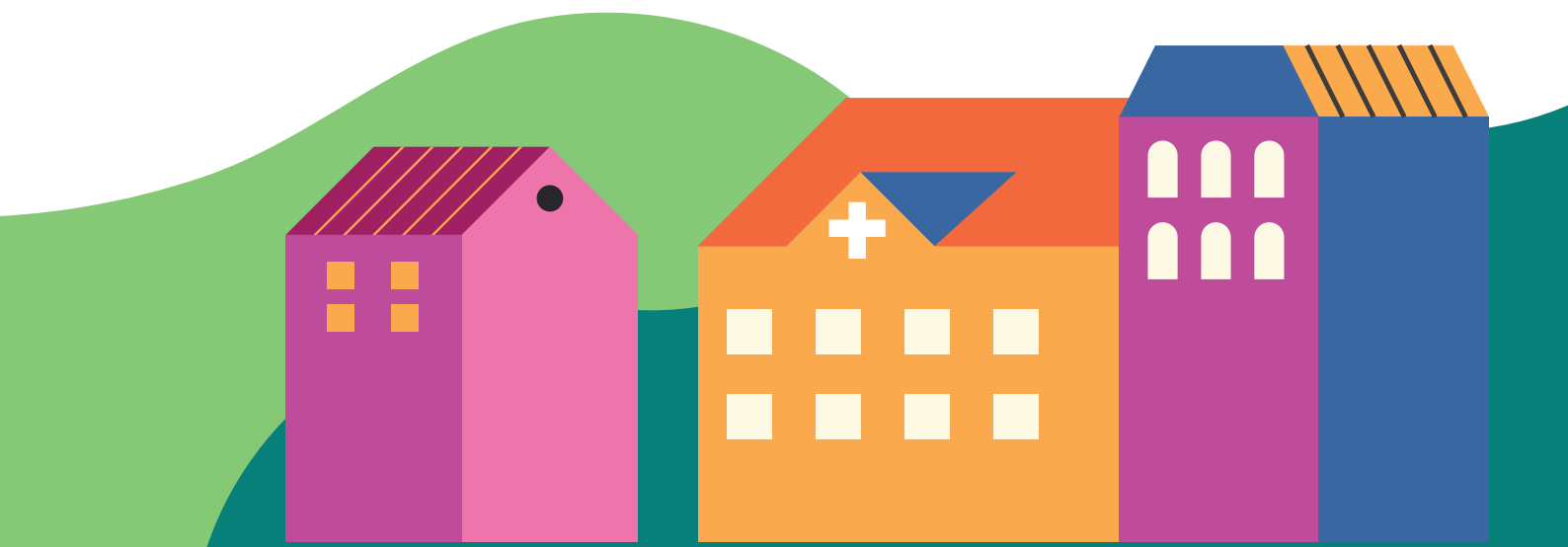
Starting a new life in a new country brings many opportunities and challenges. Good health is an important foundation for building a safe, stable and successful future for you and your family.

Australia's health system provides high-quality, safe and affordable care. There are many different types of health services available, including public hospitals, urgent care clinics, general practitioners (GPs), medical specialists, pharmacists, nurses and allied health professionals.

This guide provides an introduction to how the Australian health system works and how to find and use health services in Ballarat. It aims to help you feel informed, confident and supported when seeking care for yourself and your family.



This guide was developed through Ballarat Community Health's Multicultural Access Program (MAP). MAP is funded by Westvic PHN and delivered in partnership with Ballarat Community Health and the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council (BRMC).



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Emergency Contacts

Ambulance, Fire or Police

 **000**

Nearest Hospital Emergency

Grampians Health
Ballarat Base Hospital



Enter from Mair Street (near corner of
Drummond Street Ballarat)

 **(03) 5320 4000**

Nurse-On-Call

24/7 Health Advice

 **1300 60 60 24**

After-Hours Doctor

13SICK

 **13 74 25**

Interpreter

TIS National

 **13 14 50**

Lifeline

24/7 Crisis Line

 **13 11 14**



Health Cards

Medicare

Medicare is Australia's public health insurance system.

Permanent residents and eligible visa holders in Australia may be able to access free or discounted healthcare through either a Medicare Card or a Health Care Card.

There are 3 types of Medicare cards

-  Green - Standard Medicare cards
-  Blue - Interim Medicare cards. Some temporary Visa holders who have applied for permanent residency may be eligible.
-  Yellow - Reciprocal Health Care Agreement Medicare cards. For people visiting Australia from a country with a Reciprocal Health Agreement (RHCA).



How to apply for a medicare card

-  Visit a Services Australia (Centrelink) office
-  Apply online <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/medicare>
Call Medicare **13 20 11**

When applying you will need

-  Passport
-  Visa or travel documents
-  Another form of ID

Medicare helps pay for

-  GP (doctor) visits and specialists
-  X-rays and blood tests
-  Public hospital treatment
-  Eye tests by optometrists

What if I don't have a Medicare Card?

Not all visas are eligible for Medicare. If you are an asylum seeker who does not have Medicare and needs health care, or newly arrived migrant in Ballarat and need help applying for Medicare, contact:



Ballarat Community Health

Refugee Health Program (Interpreters available) (03) 5338 4500

If you are a temporary resident or international student, you will require private health insurance.

Health Care Card

A Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card can help reduce health costs if you receive certain payments or the pension from Centrelink.



These cards help with



Cheaper prescription medicines (PBS)



Reduced public transport fares in Victoria



Lower utility bills (gas, electricity)



Some ambulance support schemes



Public dental services

More Information



<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/health-care-card>



<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/pensioner-concession-card>



Centrelink Multilingual Line 131 202

Professional Interpreters

If you do not speak English well, always ask for a professional interpreter for health appointments, for your health care.

It's best not to use family or friends to interpret but you can take them as a support person.



TIS National – Translating and Interpreting Service Free and Confidential within Australia.



Call **131 450** and say your language



Available 24 hours, 7 days a week



Doctors, specialists, pharmacies and hospitals can book a TIS interpreter for you if you need one



Phone or in person interpreting can be arranged

Free Translated Documents

You may be able to get important settlement documents translated for free within your first 2 years in Australia (eligible permanent residents and visa holders).



Call TIS National **1300 847 387** or
Visit <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>

For Advice in Ballarat

Contact a Refugee Health Program team member.



Ballarat Community Health
Refugee Health Program (Interpreters available) **(03) 5338 4500**

Deciding where to go when you are sick

Emergency Departments

If you have a medical emergency or life-threatening illness, you can go to the Emergency Department at your nearest public hospital.



They are free with Medicare



Emergency departments are open 24 hours a day



There are always nurses and doctors on duty



You may have to wait several hours as the doctors will see the sickest patients first

Urgent Care Centres

If you have an urgent health problem that is not an emergency. But you can't wait to get in to see a GP, you can go to an Urgent Care Centre nearest to you.



This is a free service



No Medicare card is required

General Practitioners (GPs)

Family doctors in Australia are called General Practitioners (GPs). In Australia most people go to a GP when they have health problems.



You will require an appointment to see a GP



There will be a fee which is partially or fully covered by Medicare

Pharmacy

In Australia, the place you buy medicines or other health products is called a pharmacy or chemist.

At the pharmacy you can also ask for free advice about minor injuries, illness and sickness that do not need urgent attention.

Non-life-threatening Medical Advice Help Lines



Nurse-On-Call (24/7 Health Advice) 1300 60 60 24



After-Hours Doctor 13 74 25

Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) is a public health service to treat non-life-threatening emergencies.

If your situation is life-threatening, please call Triple Zero 000



Free public health service available anywhere in Victoria



24 hours a day, seven days a week



You do not need a Medicare card



Video consultations only (mobile phone, PC, laptop or tablet), the camera must be turned on and the patient must be awake to be triaged virtually



Victorian Virtual Emergency department (VVED) 13 14 50

<https://www.vved.org.au/>

Emergency Services

Ambulance Victoria

The emergency number in Australia is 000.

Use this number for Ambulance, Fire or Police.

If you do not speak English, say your language – the operator will connect an interpreter.

Call 000 if you have a medical emergency.

 An Ambulance officer can give first aid and take you to an Emergency Department at a public hospital

Ambulance services are not free in Victoria.

 Ambulance Victoria membership required or else can be costly

 Some concession card holders receive free ambulance cover

 Some private health insurance provides ambulance cover

If you have a Medical Emergency

1. Call 000

2. When the operator asks if you want Fire, Police, Ambulance tell them "Ambulance"

3. IF YOU SPEAK ENGLISH

Answer the operator's questions

- Your name
- Your telephone number
- The emergency
- The address of the emergency
- The nearest cross street or landmark

IF YOU CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH

- Tell the operator which language you speak.
- Wait for the operator to connect you to an Interpreter.

DO NOT HANG UP

Do you know where to go?

Is it life threatening? Do you need emergency care?

Yes

Call 000

or go to
your nearest
Emergency
Department

Ballarat Base Hospital Emergency Department

Enter from Mair Street (near
corner of Drummond Street
Ballarat)

Phone 5320 4000

You do not always require a
Medicare care card.

No

Can it wait until I get an
appointment with my GP?

Yes

Make an
appointment
with your GP

Find a local GP (Doctor)

Visit [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au)
and type in your postcode.
<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/guided-search/general-practice>

No

Go to your
nearest
Medicare
Urgent Care
Clinic

Medicare Urgent Care Clinic Ballarat

Level 1, 1010 Sturt Street
Ballarat
Phone 4320 0820
Free service.
No Medicare Card
required.
Open 9am – 11pm.
No appointment required.

Australian Hospitals

You should avoid going to the hospital for non-urgent issues. Emergency departments are for life-threatening emergencies or critical care. For non-urgent health matters, you will face extremely long wait times.

Patients are treated based on urgency. The sickest are seen first, your local doctor is the best first point of contact for non-urgent health issues, chronic conditions, and routine health checks.

Public Hospitals

Public hospitals in Australia are government-owned and managed. They provide complete medical care, including emergency services, in-patient care, and outpatient services, ensuring access to essential healthcare for all.

-  Medicare covers the full cost of public hospital services
-  Public hospital healthcare is free to all Australian citizens and permanent residents
-  Those that do not have Medicare, unless they are an asylum seeker or covered by a reciprocal agreement, must have adequate health insurance or finances to cover the full cost of their treatment
-  **For life-threatening injury or illness, care will not be refused**

Private Hospitals

Private hospitals are those owned by the private sector but are still licensed by the government. You can choose to be a private patient in a private hospital even if you do not have private health insurance.

-  You will have to pay for most of the fees yourself, but Medicare will pay for some charges.

Looking after your health

General Practitioners (GP)

For non-life-threatening health problem, you should see a General Practitioner (GP). Regular health checks help find issues early (heart disease, diabetes, cancer).

-  Some medical centres "Bulk bill", this means they only charge the amount covered by Medicare, there is no cost to the patient
-  Some clinics charge more than the Medicare amount, and patients must pay the extra amount, this is called "gap" payment, you can see a GP without Medicare but this will cost more
-  Ask someone from your community if they know a GP who speaks your language, or ask your GP to book an interpreter if needed (It is best to not use friends or family to translate, but you can take them as a support person)
-  You can change GP if you are unhappy
-  GP appointments can be made by calling a clinic directly or booking online
-  Find a GP (General Practice) near you online at [healthdirect https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/guided-search/general-practice](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/guided-search/general-practice)

Specialists

If you have a health problem that is complex or ongoing, your GP may refer you to a specialist doctor who is an expert in that specific area.

These are doctors that have special skills in a certain area of medicine, for example, heart doctors (cardiologists) and skin doctors (dermatologists).

-  To see a specialist in Australia you will require a referral from your GP
-  Most specialists do not bulk bill, some may with a health care card
-  Seeing a private specialist doctor can be expensive, you can ask your GP to refer you to a specialist in a public hospital in an outpatient clinic (The waiting period for an appointment will be longer, but it is free under Medicare)

Medicine

If your doctor advises you to take medicine, they may give you a written (script) prescription.

Take the script to a pharmacy (chemist). Pharmacists can explain how and when to take your medicine. Show your Medicare or Concession Card to get discounts.



Some medicines are cheaper under Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)



PBS Safety Net helps reduce costs if you spend a lot on medicines
<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/medicare-safety-nets>

Pharmacies (Chemists)

A pharmacy is a shop where you can buy medicines.



Some medicines need a prescription (script) from a doctor, and others you can buy without one



Pharmacies can also give advice for some simple health conditions, such as headaches, stomach upsets, bites and stings

Nurses

Nurses in Australia are well trained and skilled health care workers.

Some nurses have special training, they work in areas such as:



Pregnancy and birth (midwives)



Babies and young children (maternal and child health nurses)



Mental health and emotional wellbeing (mental health nurses)



Helping new migrants and refugees (refugee health nurses)

Nurse Practitioners

Some specialist nurses look after their own patients and run clinics.

These nurses are called nurse practitioners, they can:



Arrange medical tests



Give prescriptions for medicine



Send patients to other health services

Victorian Refugee Health Program

Refugee Health nurses are located in some community health centres throughout Victoria. They assist Refugees and Asylum seekers by offering:

-  Free Health assessments and referrals
-  Information about health care in Victoria
-  Information about doctors in your area
-  Help seeing doctors if you are an asylum seeker or don't have Medicare
-  Help with Medicare or NDIS applications
-  Immunisations and health education
-  Referral to relevant community groups and community services
-  Refugee Service Advice (Victorian region) **(03) 9448 5588**
-  Ballarat Community Health Refugee and Immigrant Health Nurse
(Ballarat and Grampians region) **(03) 5338 4500**
<https://bchc.org.au/service/refugee-immigrant-health/>



Dental Services

Regular dental check-ups are important, even when you feel well and have no tooth pain.

Most dental care is done in private clinics and are not covered by Medicare. If you have private health insurance your cover may help you pay some general and specialist dental costs. Check with your insurer before your check-up, so you know what costs are covered.

-  Dental check-ups every 6 to 12 months can help prevent problems before they become painful, costly or difficult to treat
-  You may be eligible for Public Dental Services
-  To find local services visit <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/all-services>

Eye and Vision Services

Are you worried about your sight, or do you need glasses?

-  Eye tests are free once every two years (or annually if needed) with a Medicare card, tests are done by optometrists
-  If you need glasses or contact lenses, you may be eligible for low-cost options through the Victorian Eyecare Service (VES) if you have a Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or DVA Gold Card
-  Victorian Eyecare Service (03) 9349 7400
<https://www.ves.org.au/>
-  To find local services
<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/all-services>



Hearing Services

Do you or a family member have a hearing problem?

For Children

If you are worried about your child's hearing, speech, or language development, ask your GP for a referral for a hearing test. Tests for children and young adults (up to 26) are often free at community health centres or public hospitals.

For Adults

The Australian Government Hearing Services Program provides free or discounted hearing tests and hearing aids for eligible people (e.g., pensioners and veterans).



Hearing Services Program 1800 500 726

<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/hearing-services-program?language=en>



To find local services

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services/all-services>

Community Health Services

Community Health Services offer medical and wellbeing services.

They can help with GP and nurse appointments, counselling, physio, occupational therapy, alcohol and drug support, nutrition, chronic disease programs, multicultural health and interpreter support.

Ballarat Community Health has six different locations offering services



Lucas 12 Lilburne Street

Sebastopol 260 Vickers Street

Wendouree 1042 Howitt Street

Bakery Hill 28 Victoria Street

Wendouree 10 Learmonth Road

Ballarat Central 1/20 Dawson Street (headspace)



Ballarat Community Health (03) 5338 4500

<https://bchc.org.au/>

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS is a Scheme provided by the Australian Government to provide funding to support people with permanent or significant disabilities by paying for services required.

Eligibility

1. Be an Australian citizen/permanent resident/ or have an eligible visa, and
2. Have a disability that affects your daily life



Supports can include mobility and personal care, communication aids, employment and community participation, and psychosocial support



NDIS 1800 800 110

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

My Aged Care

My Aged Care is the Australian Government's service that helps older people, families and carers find and access aged care support. It provides simple information about available services and how to get help.

My Aged Care can help connect you with these programs



Support at Home – help to live safely and independently at home



Residential aged care – support and accommodation in an aged care home



Community care programs – services such as the Commonwealth Home Support Program



Call My Aged Care 1800 200 422

If you are without a trusted support person or face barriers such as language, understanding information, making decisions, or feeling unsafe without support, you can contact Care Finder. This is a free service that helps older people who need additional support to access My Aged Care and other local services.



<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/help-care-finder>

In Ballarat, Care Finder is provided by



CatholicCare Victoria 1800 123 228
and Wintringham (03) 9034 4824

Cancer Screening Programs (Victoria)

The Australian Government provides free cancer screening tests.

These programs aim to find cancer or conditions leading to cancer early so they can be treated early. This helps improve a good outcome. You can speak to your GP for more advice.

Breast Screening

Breast screening checks for signs of breast cancer before a person notices any symptoms. It uses a special X-ray of the breasts called a mammogram.

 For **women aged 50–74**, book directly (No Medicare card needed)

 BreastScreen Victoria **13 20 50**
<https://www.breastscreen.org.au/>

Cervical Screening

The Cervical Screening Test is a simple process that looks for signs of the human papillomavirus (HPV) – a common infection that causes most cervical cancers.

 For **women aged 25–74**, you can request a cervical screening test with your GP or at

 BCH Sexual Health & Reproductive Clinic **(03) 5338 4500**
https://bchc.org.au/service/information_and_advice_on_sexual_health/

Bowel Screening

Bowel screening test kit is sent out to your home every 2 years. Two small samples of poo are collected and are sent back via post.

 For **women and men aged 50–74**, kits are sent to you or can be ordered

 National Bowel Cancer Screening **1800 627 701**
<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/national-bowel-cancer-screening-program>

Lung Cancer Screening

Lung cancer screening is a health check that uses a special low-radiation CT scan to look for lung cancer before symptoms appear.

 For **women and men aged 50–74** with risk factors (Ask you GP)

 National Lung Cancer Screening Program
<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/nlcsp>

Women's, Child & Youth Health Services

Women's Health Services

Women's health services in Victoria provide advice and support on reproductive and sexual health, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause, family violence, screening, and counselling.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Make an appointment with a BCH sexual health nurse who can advise and support you with pregnancy issues, menopause, contraception, screens and STIs.



Ballarat Community Health (03) 5338 4500

<https://bchc.org.au/>



You can ask for a female interpreter.

Family Violence

Family violence is a pattern of behaviour where one person tries to dominate and control the other. Not all family violence is physical— it can be about controlling another person's actions, appearance, finances and social interactions too.

Family violence in Australia is a serious human rights violation, there are support services in place to help those in need. Contact the Police (emergency) for urgent help.



In an emergency call 000



Orange Door 1800 219 819

<https://www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au/>



For 24 hours advice you can contact 1800 Respect. Call **1800 737 732**, text **0458737732**, chat online or video call at <https://1800respect.org.au/>

Child and Family Health Services

If you have young children aged 0-5 years, there is free health support available including baby checks, development assessments, breastfeeding support, immunisation information, and parenting groups.



City of Ballarat Maternal & Child Health Service (03) 5320 5720



City of Ballarat Family & Children's Services

<https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/community/family-and-childrens-services>

Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies

Ballarat Community Health offers Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies (HMHB) a program for pregnant women experiencing challenges which may impact the health, social and emotional wellbeing of themselves or their unborn baby.



Ballarat Community Health (HMHB Program) (03) 5338 4580

<https://bchc.org.au/service/healthy-mothers-healthy-babies/>



Maternal and Child Healthline

Free 24 hour phonenumber support 13 22 29



Youth Health Services (12–25 Years)

If you have teenage children, there is FREE and confidential advice available on mental health, relationships, alcohol & drugs, physical health and wellbeing.

headspace supports young people aged 12–25 years with mental health, physical health, drug & alcohol, educational & vocational support. All headspace Ballarat services are free.



headspace Ballarat (03) 5304 4777

Level 1/20 Dawson Street North Ballarat Central

<https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/ballarat/>

Ballarat Community Health youth support service for young people aged 10-17 years old who are at risk of involvement with the police, youth justice or homelessness.



BCH Youth Support Program (03) 5338 4500

<https://bchc.org.au/service/youth-support-services/>



Who Else Can Help?

Allied Health Professionals

Allied health professionals are trained health workers who are experts in their own area of healthcare. They study for many years and must be registered to work in Australia.

They help people of all ages with physical, mental, and emotional health problems. They use treatments that are proven to work and are safe. Allied health professionals work with doctors, nurses, and dentists to give you the best care.

They can find out what is wrong, treat health problems, help you recover after illness or injury and help you stay healthy. Examples of allied health professionals include; podiatrists, physiotherapists and dietitians.

Where can I find them?



Community Health Centres, Hospitals and Private Clinics



Allied Health Direct

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/allied-health>

You can



Contact them directly



Ask your doctor for a referral



Ask friends or family for recommendations

Costs



Medicare may help pay for some services



You may need to pay some money yourself



Private health insurance may also help cover costs

Looking After Your Emotional & Mental Health

Mental Health Services

If you are having social or emotional problems, there is help available.

You can speak to your GP if you are feeling anxious or depressed. They can help you find the best services to support you, such as psychologists, counsellors, social workers or psychiatrists.

Mental Health Services are available for more severe psychological health issues. These services help people to recover and live a better life. Public mental health services are free and confidential.

If you need help right away you can call one of these numbers below.

 **In an emergency call 000**



Lifeline 24/7 Crisis Line **13 11 14**

Beyond Blue **1300 224 636**

Suicide Call Back Service **1300 659 467**

MensLine Australia **1300 78 99 78**

Kids Helpline (5-25 Years) **1800 55 1800**

Nurse on Call (24/7 Advice) **1300 60 60 24**



Ballarat Services



Counselling and mental health support
Ballarat Community Health (03) 5338 4500

<https://bchc.org.au/service/mental-health-services/>

headspace Ballarat (12–25 years) (03) 5304 4777
Level 1/20 Dawson Street North, Ballarat Central

<https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/ballarat/>

Grampians Mental Health Service (24/7) 1300 659 467

There are services that provide counselling to help refugees and people from refugee-like backgrounds who have suffered traumatic experiences before coming to Australia.



Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture
Foundation House (03) 9389 8900

<https://foundationhouse.org.au/>

Refugee Health Nurse
Ballarat Community Health (03) 5338 4500

<https://bchc.org.au/service/refugee-immigrant-health/>

These counsellors are trained health professionals who can help you overcome difficulties in your life and make changes you want in your life. Mental health services are available for more severe psychological health issues. These services help people to recover and live a better life.

Do you need more support?

Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council (BRMC) welcomes you. BRMC support migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and culturally diverse communities. Providing culturally safe services that promote health, wellbeing, social connection and access to community support.



Ballarat Welcome Centre
25-39 Barkly Street, Ballarat VIC 3350



Phone (03) 5383 0613
<https://www.brmc.org.au/>

BRMC Services



Social connection and community participation programs



Women's wellbeing programs



Seniors' wellbeing and social support activities



Health information



Family Violence navigation and referrals



Mental health and wellbeing support



English language and conversation support



Emergency Food Relief and support



Advocacy and assistance accessing health and community services



Health Rights & Responsibilities

As a patient or client we all have rights and responsibilities. These apply when seeing any health worker, such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors.

Your Rights

-  To be treated with respect, dignity and privacy
-  Have your culture, beliefs and religion respected
-  Receive clear information about your condition and treatment
-  Ask for a professional interpreter **TIS 131 450**
-  Ask questions until you understand
-  Agree or refuse treatment; get a second opinion
-  Have your personal health information kept private
-  Access your medical records

Consent to Treatment

-  Before treatment, health workers explain the treatment, risks/side effects and other options
-  Most consent is verbal; some procedures require written consent (e.g., surgery)
-  Under 14 years of age parent/guardian consent required
Ages 14–16 years may consent if understanding is demonstrated (joint decision encouraged).

Your Responsibilities

-  Tell health workers about your medical history, symptoms and medicines
-  Inform them if you use alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs
-  Attend appointments on time or cancel if you cannot attend
-  Use interpreters, not family, for medical decisions
-  Treat staff and other patients with respect

How to make a complaint

-  Try speaking with the staff or the clinic/hospital manager first.
If not resolved, contact
-  Health Complaints Commissioner (Victoria) **1300 582 113**
Free, confidential interpreters available
<https://www.hcc.vic.gov.au/>
-  **In an emergency call 000**



Important Information

This guide has been produced as a general resource to assist immigrants in accessing health and support services available in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia and reflects information current at the time of printing in 2026.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the content at the time of publication, services, eligibility criteria, contact details, and policies are subject to change. The publishers and contributors accept no responsibility for any loss or inconvenience arising from the use of information that may have been superseded.

The information contained in this guide is intended as a general reference only and does not constitute legal, medical, financial, or professional advice. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for independent professional advice tailored to your individual circumstances.

Readers are strongly encouraged to seek qualified professional advice regarding their specific health, legal, and settlement needs. Where information in this guide conflicts with current official sources, the official sources should be relied upon.

For up-to-date service information, please contact the relevant service provider directly or visit <https://www.vic.gov.au/> or <https://www.health.gov.au/>

If you require an interpreter, you may access the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on **131 450**.