



# Caring for refugee-background patients in Brisbane

*This factsheet is designed for GPs and other staff at general practices in the Brisbane South PHN region*



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## Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)

The Humanitarian Settlement Program is currently facilitated in Queensland by [Multicultural Australia \(MA\)](#). Travel from overseas has been facilitated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for many years, but a new provider, Toll Transport, was recently contracted for this role.

MA receives notification of expected incoming arrivals. MA allocate the initial health triage and assessment of incoming individuals/families to either:

- Metro South Refugee Health Service (MSRHS) if the person/family is being settled in the Logan area or is known to have a proposer<sup>2</sup> there, or
- Mater Integrated Refugee Health Service (MIRHS) for all other Brisbane areas.

<sup>1</sup> Image shared for public use by the Refugee Council of Australia, 2024

<sup>2</sup> A proposer is usually a family member or friend who agrees to support the incoming participant/family.

MA will provide support for new arrivals in their Welcome and Initial Settlement Support Team (WAISS) for their first 4 weeks in Australia.

Within 3-5 days after arrival, a family will meet their dedicated Welcome Coordinator<sup>3</sup> who will support them with case management needs for their first 6 months. The team supports independence with medical appointment attendance and associated tasks. Typically, Cultural Support Workers (CSWs) will attend the first 1-2 appointments with the family to support their travel and attendance and will wait outside of the appointment room. A CSW is unable to assist with interpreting or follow-up tasks.

After 6 months in Australia, MA will transition care to their Connections and Belonging team.

After 12-18 months in Australia, MA *may* transition care to the [Settlement Engagement and Transition Support \(SETS\) program](#). Some families do not require this ongoing support. SETS is facilitated by multiple providers, listed [here](#).

## Healthcare on arrival in Brisbane

- On arrival, the assigned refugee health service will conduct a phone triage with the participants. Any acute health or medication needs will be addressed at a general practice that offers urgent appointments to new patients, with communication between the refugee health service and MA.
- Referrals may be commenced by a refugee health service to services such as Child Health,

<sup>3</sup> Previously known as a Case Manager. Welcome Coordinator contact details should be shared with you when a referral is received from either MIRHS or MSRHS.



hearing, oral health, TB screening or vision screening.

- Immunisation records will be uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR), if provided and if the family is seen by a refugee health service.
- An in-person nursing assessment may then occur by the refugee health service, if deemed necessary, prior to referral to a long-term GP.
- The referral to a GP will include the information received from the pre-arrival medical assessment, and any information stored in HAP-Lite<sup>4</sup>, plus the nursing assessment, if this has been completed.
- HSP participants are usually referred onto a GP for assessment and ongoing care once their long-term accommodation destination is confirmed.
- If a participant commences health care on arrival with MIRHS but then settles in the Logan area, the referral will usually be transferred through to MSRHS, and then onto a local GP.
- The nursing assessment information, if available, will form part of the refugee [Comprehensive Health Assessment \(CHA\)](#) that will be completed by the participant's GP.

**A referral to a particular general practice will usually be determined by:**

- 1) proximity and ease of access to the participant's long-term settlement location
- 2) the language(s) spoken and ethnic background of the participant(s) and GP(s)
- 3) bulk-billing practices (all HSP participants are eligible for Medicare and Health Care Cards)
- 4) experience or willingness to provide long-term care to refugee-background patients.

- A refugee CHA is recommended to be commenced within 4 weeks after arrival in Australia.
- The MBS item numbers (703-707) can be claimed only once for this type of CHA, within the first 12 months after arrival.

## Frequently Asked Questions about refugee-background patients

### What is the visa status of a refugee and are they eligible for bulk-billed treatment?

HSP participants enter Australia on one of a number of refugee visas, predominantly 200, 201, 202, 203 and 204. All these visa holders are permanent residents on arrival and are eligible for Medicare and a Health Care Card. MA will support their applications for Medicare and Health Care Card upon their arrival. Receiving the card can take a few weeks, but the family's Welcome Coordinator is likely to be able to provide the Medicare number earlier. It can also be accessed by a practice via PRODA.

If you see an HSP participant in their first couple of weeks, it would be helpful if you could delay billing, investigations or medication prescriptions (*if safe to do so*) until their Medicare number and Health Care Card have been provided.

### I / my practice would benefit from support in seeing people from a refugee background. What support is available?

Practices caring for refugee patients in the Brisbane South PHN region may be eligible for a co-located Refugee Health Registered Nurse to support your practice with the care of your patients. Contact [mirhs@mater.org.au](mailto:mirhs@mater.org.au) or phone 07 3163 2891 for further information.

<sup>4</sup> HAPLite is a reduced version of the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) health processing system. The Health Assessment

Portal (HAP) is accessible via the internet. Please see further information below in the Frequently Asked Questions section.



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Brisbane South PHN has a GP on staff, who specialises in refugee care (Dr Margaret Kay). Dr Kay is available for 1:1, non-urgent support for you or your practice.

Brisbane South PHN and the [Refugee Health Network Queensland](#) run regular events for GPs and practice staff about refugee health, and provide many resources that may be of use to you about:

- Working with interpreters (GPs and practice staff have free access to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National))
- Caring for patients from other cultures
- Common health issues for refugees who've lived or transited through particular places
- Catch-up immunisations
- Mental health and psychosocial support for refugee-background patients
- Pathology recommendations for refugee-background patients
- Advice and support for completing a refugee Comprehensive Health Assessment (MBS items 703-707)
- If you would like support with any of these topics, or have further questions, please contact [multicultural@bsphn.org.au](mailto:multicultural@bsphn.org.au) or 07 3864 7580.

### **How do I contact Multicultural Australia about a patient who arrived as a refugee within the last 18 months?**

If you are welcoming a new patient via MSRHS or MIRHS, the referral you received should contain the patient/family's assigned Welcome Coordinator's name and email address.

A Welcome Coordinator's email address is always: [\[First name\] \[First letter of surname\] @mcaus.org.au](#)

If you do not know the assigned staff member's name, call MA on 07 3337 5400 and ask for the intake worker for the [HSP program](#). Intake workers are available Monday - Friday from 9am to 4.30pm at MA's Woolloongabba and Logan offices.

If you wish to send a message to the relevant staff member about upcoming appointments, then the intake worker can respond to this.

If you wish to talk with the allocated staff member, then you can expect a return call between 24-48 hours, to you or your practice nurse if you're unavailable. If the request is urgent, please advise the intake worker so that they can assess the response required.

### **Who should I notify about an appointment for my refugee-background patient?**

Firstly, please ensure the patient/family are advised (via an interpreter, when required) of their appointments.

It is also helpful if a GP or practice can notify the patient/family's Welcome Coordinator of any appointments scheduled in the first 6 months after arrival. This will encourage attendance of the patient/family, and ensure any support needed for the appointment is provided.

Note, booking an interpreter for the appointment is the responsibility of your practice. You can book an in-person, video or telephone interpreter for free via [TIS National](#).

### **Who should I call with questions about a patient who arrived as a refugee > 18 months ago?**

After 18 months, some humanitarian entrants are referred from the Humanitarian Support Program to a [Settlement Engagement and Transition Support \(SETS\)](#) program, if support is still required. This is also funded by the Department of Home Affairs, and helps individuals from humanitarian and [eligible](#) permanent migrants and their communities build capacity and independence, improve social participation, personal and economic wellbeing, and increased community connectedness.

Please ask the patient/family if they are a [Settlement Engagement and Transition Support](#) program participant. If they are, ask which SETS service they are a part of, and then contact the specific SETS program provider [here](#).



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If your patient is not part of the SETS program, please contact Brisbane South PHN at [multicultural@bsphn.org.au](mailto:multicultural@bsphn.org.au) or 07 3864 7580, to enquire about further support options.

**My patient needs more support than they're getting. What can I do?**

For a patient in the HSP who has complex health needs, we encourage you to contact their Welcome Coordinator to discuss their needs.

If your patient is no longer being supported via the HSP, you can also submit a direct referral for Specialised and Intensive Services via the Department of Home Affairs [here](#).

**I need my patient's health records translated. Is there a service available?**

The patient/family's Welcome Coordinator is able to arrange for any hard-copy health documents, such as immunisation records, to be translated through the Department of Home Affairs [Free Translating Service](#). If your patient has such documents and they're not already translated in the referral you've received, please contact their Welcome Coordinator to request translation.

**Can MA access and share the visa medical report that was conducted overseas by IOM/Toll Transport via the Health Assessment Programme (HAPLite)?**

No, MA staff do not have access to this health information.

Relevant information should be provided to you, the GP, by MSRHS or MIRHS who do have access to it – depending on the region where the client has settled.

The health information within HAPLite varies a lot and sometimes very significant health issues are underestimated or undertreated. E.g. Sometimes a live virus vaccine, such as MMR, may be provided as part of the pre-departure health check but not all people of refugee background receive a pre-departure health check.

Typically, a general practice will receive a copy of HAPLite information for a patient with the referral from either MSRHS or MIRHS. General practices are also able to request read-only access to HAPLite via creating a Home Affairs [Immi account](#) and completing the HAP Access form once your account is established.

Clients who complete medical examinations for the purpose of migration to Australia specifically consent to Home Affairs disclosing their personal information to state and territory health authorities and the relevant health clinics for the purpose of monitoring health and settlement. The only clients that you, the GP, are able to access in HAPLite are those referred to you by MSRHS or MIRHS.

**My patient has a disability that has a functional impact. They need access to the NDIS. Who can support me with the application?**

General workflow is that a patient who arrives with a known or suspected disability, will be referred into the Specialised and Intensive Services Program at MA, and their complex case manager will facilitate access to the relevant services including, their GP. If your patient has a newly identified disability, please encourage them to speak with their MA worker.

Other disability support providers include [Amparo](#) (multicultural disability advocacy service), and/or the NDIS Local Area Coordinators at [Carer's Queensland](#) (for those over age 9), or [Benevolent Society](#) (for those under 9) for the application process.

If your patient needs an Occupational Therapy assessment, please refer them to the Mater Refugee and Asylum Seeker Occupational Therapy Program (RASOTP). Referral can be made via referral letter submitted via Medical Objects to "Mater Refugee Health Service": RM4101000BD, or fax 07 3163 1760.

Contact [RASOTP@mater.org.au](mailto:RASOTP@mater.org.au) for general enquiries or eligibility criteria.



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## Helpful Links to Resources for General Practices

### Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide:

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

### Clinician resources related to refugee health:

[www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/forclinicians/](http://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/forclinicians/)

### Clinician referral pathways for refugees:

[www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/forclinicians/refer/](http://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/forclinicians/refer/)

### Health Pathways Brisbane South:

<https://bsphn.org.au/practice-support/healthpathways/about-healthpathways>

[Refugee and Asylum Health - Community Health Pathways Brisbane South \(SpotOnHealth\)](#)

### Refugee Health Assessment Template:

[https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FINAL\\_2018\\_Sept21\\_On-Arrival-Refugee-Health-Assessment.pdf](https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FINAL_2018_Sept21_On-Arrival-Refugee-Health-Assessment.pdf)

### Mental health referral pathway for refugees:

[www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SE-Qld-Mental-Health-Referral-Pathway-v14-March-2022.pdf](http://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SE-Qld-Mental-Health-Referral-Pathway-v14-March-2022.pdf)

### Refugee Health Network Queensland

[www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au](http://www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au)

### Multicultural Australia

[www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au)

### Humanitarian Settlement Program

[www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au/settlement/humanitarian-settlement-program/](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au/settlement/humanitarian-settlement-program/)

### Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program

[www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au/settlement/engagement-transition-support/](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.org.au/settlement/engagement-transition-support/)

### Specialised and Intensive Services Referral (Department of Home Affairs)

<https://opa-web.dss.gov.au/opa/web-determinations/startsession/HSP+SIS+Referral+Form>

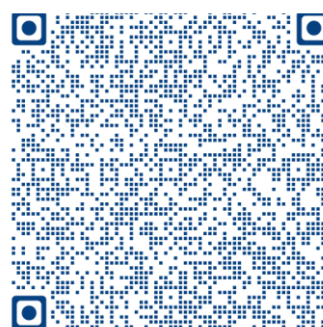
### Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS National)

[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

### Free Translating Service

<https://translating.homeaffairs.gov.au/en>

Scan for digital access to this factsheet



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