

# Asylum Seekers

*A fact sheet for Victorian Health Services*

There have been recent changes to the arrangements for many asylum seekers living in Australia. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide health services with clarity around asylum seekers' accommodation and entitlements, to also provide relevant resources and contact details of agencies that work with asylum seekers.

## Asylum seeker

A person who is an asylum seeker has applied for a protection visa to remain in Australia and is awaiting a decision. Asylum seekers arrive in Australia by plane and by boat, some arrive with valid visas and others arrive with no visa.

### 1. Asylum seekers living in the community

Some asylum seekers live in the community while they are awaiting the outcome of their protection visa application. Typically people who have arrived in Australia by plane with a valid visa (eg. tourist or student visa) remain living in the community while their application is being processed. Entitlements for asylum seekers living in the community vary including access to work rights and Medicare. Access to these entitlements are determined by a number of factors, such as whether a person's original visa is still valid, the type of bridging visa they are issued subsequent to the expiry of their original visa and the stage of their application for a protection visa. Asylum seekers do not have access to Centrelink payments however in some circumstances they may receive income support via Red Cross, such as through the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS, Department of Immigration and Citizenship DIAC [Fact Sheet 62](#)) or Community Assistance Support program (CAS, DIAC [Fact Sheet 64](#)). Asylum seekers are not able to apply for family reunion or travel overseas. Children are able to attend school, adults do not have access to formal English language classes (Adult Migrant English Program - AMEP), however they may attend informal community or volunteer classes.

### **Medicare ineligible asylum seekers**

In Victoria, asylum seekers are able to access almost all Victorian government health and community services, such as community health centres and disability services, as eligibility for most services does not rely on visa or residency status. Further, under special arrangements in Victoria, Medicare ineligible asylum seekers are entitled to access health services without charge that normally require a Medicare card, including hospitals, emergency ambulance and dental services. They are also eligible for a public transport concession card.

However Medicare ineligible asylum seekers often have to rely on pro bono GP services provided by groups such as Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, West Melbourne, Ph. 9326 6066, Cardinia Casey Asylum Seeker & Refugee Health Clinic – Doveton Site, Ph. 9212 5700 and Banyule CH, Greensborough, Ph. 9450 2000. An information resource with full details on access to a range of Victorian government services can be found at

[www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm)

### 2. Asylum seekers living in detention

People that arrive in Australia by boat or plane without a valid visa are mandatorily detained. In Victoria people are detained at Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre (IDC), however people may be held in one or more detention facilities over an extended period of time. Other detention facilities include Villawood IDC (NSW), Curtin (WA) and Christmas Island amongst others.

The Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) is a place of alternative detention which houses young people. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) report that immigration transit accommodation provides a narrower range of services at a less intensive level than is typically offered in an immigration detention centre because of the intended short-stay nature of

the client group. However people may stay in this accommodation for an extended length of time.

In all detention centers most primary health services are provided onsite by a privately contracted service provider (International Health and Medical Services, IHMS), with referral to external health providers in the community as clinically required.

### 3. Community Detention Program

Community detention is a form of immigration detention that is less restrictive. For people in community detention and immigration residential housing, health care services are provided by selected community-based health providers contracted by IHMS. IHMS contracts the health providers on a fee-for-service costs basis, as people in community detention are not Medicare eligible. IHMS has contracted particular pharmacies to provide medications typically supplied under the PBS (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme). People in community detention are provided with an IHMS card to identify them as entitled to these services. Red Cross and partner agencies provide casework for people in community detention in Victoria. Queries regarding entitlements for asylum seekers in community detention should be directed to the

### Further reading

Asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria, Department of Health, Revised May 2011

[www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm)

Travel Concession: <http://www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/assets/PDFs/2011-Fares-and-Ticketing-Manual/Fares-Ticketing-Manual-Update-2011WEB-Ch06.pdf>

Christmas Island health assessment fact sheet:

[http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/Default.aspx?PageID=1182155&A=SearchResult&SearchID=2069454&ObjectID=1182155&ObjectTy](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/Default.aspx?PageID=1182155&A=SearchResult&SearchID=2069454&ObjectID=1182155&ObjectType=1)  
[pe=1](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/Default.aspx?PageID=1182155&A=SearchResult&SearchID=2069454&ObjectID=1182155&ObjectTy).

Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS): <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/63advice.htm>

Asylum Seeker Support Program: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/62assistance.htm>

Promoting Refugee Health: A guide for doctors and other health care providers caring for people from refugee backgrounds (also relevant to asylum seekers): [http://vrhn.businesscatalyst.com/pdfs/2962%20PRH\\_Guide.pdf](http://vrhn.businesscatalyst.com/pdfs/2962%20PRH_Guide.pdf)

Caring for Refugee Patients in General Practice: A desktop guide: [http://vrhn.businesscatalyst.com/pdfs/3061%20PRH\\_DTG\\_online\\_Vic\\_S.pdf](http://vrhn.businesscatalyst.com/pdfs/3061%20PRH_DTG_online_Vic_S.pdf)

caseworker. If the caseworker is unknown contact Red Cross Migration Support Program for assistance, Ph. 8327 7883.

### 4. Permanent protection visa holders

If successful in their application for refugee status, asylum applicants are granted a permanent protection visa (typically sub class 866). This visa entitles holders to the same rights and range of services as other permanent residents in Victoria. Most people on permanent protection visas are eligible for settlement support, [AMES Consortium](#) is the Victorian provider (DIAC [Fact Sheet 66](#)). In some cases, asylum seekers are granted a permanent visa that does not include eligibility for settlement support.

#### Victorian Refugee Health Network (VRHN)

The purpose of the Victorian Refugee Health Network is to bring together key stakeholders to work to build the capacity of the health sector to provide more accessible and appropriate services for people of a refugee background. Key documents can be found on our website [www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au). You can keep in touch with news, professional development opportunities, resources and research in refugee health by signing up to our monthly E-Bulletin by emailing [ebulletin@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au](mailto:ebulletin@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au).

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## At a glance – service eligibility and entitlements

	COMMUNITY BASED ASYLUM SEEKERS	ASYLUM SEEKER LIVING IN DETENTION/MITA	ASYLUM SEEKERS LIVING IN COMMUNITY DETENTION	PERMANENT PROTECTION VISA HOLDERS
<b>CASE WORKERS</b>	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Hotham Mission or Red Cross	No	Red Cross and other partner agencies	<a href="#">AMES Consortium</a> DIAC <a href="#">Fact Sheet 66</a>
<b>WORK RIGHTS</b>	Varies	No	No	Yes
<b>INCOME SUPPORT</b>	Varies If eligible, 89% of Centrelink Special Benefit	No	89% of Centrelink Special Benefit	Eligible for Centrelink as other Victorians
<b>EDUCATION (CHILDREN AND YOUTH)</b>	English Language Schools Then primary and secondary school	School in detention	English Language Schools Then primary and secondary school	English language school 3-12 months Access to school as other Victorians
<b>EDUCATION (ADULTS)</b>	Informal volunteer run classes. Some TAFE course access – Skills Victoria	Varies	Informal volunteer run classes No access to vocational programs	510 hours of English. Same access as other Victorians
<b>TORTURE &amp; TRAUMA COUNSELLING</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	Medicare eligibility varies <a href="#">Access to Victorian DH funded programs.</a>	IHMS	IHMS / Contact Red Cross for further information	Medicare Eligible to healthcare card as other Victorians
<b>PHARMACEUTICALS</b>	If eligible, some asylum seeker agency assistance	IHMS	IHMS / Contact Red Cross for further information	Access to PBS as other Victorians
<b>TRAVEL CONCESSION</b>	Some access <a href="#">Concession Guide</a>	NA	Some access <a href="#">Concession Guide</a>	Eligible for travel concessions as other Victorians
<b>TRAVEL OVERSEAS</b>	No	No	No	Yes
<b>MIGRATION LEGAL ADVICE</b>	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS) DIAC <a href="#">Fact Sheet 63</a>	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS) DIAC <a href="#">Fact Sheet 63</a>	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance scheme (IAAAS) DIAC <a href="#">Fact Sheet 63</a>	RILC Legal Aid Community Legal Centers
<b>FAMILY REUNION APPLICATION</b>	No	No	No	Yes, refer to migration legal advice

**Disclaimer:** This information has been compiled by the Victorian Refugee Health Network for healthcare practitioners based on information from Asylum Seeker Agencies, the Victorian Department of Health and Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Every effort has been made to confirm the accuracy of the information (last updated July 21, 2011) but please advise if any amendments are required. Please contact enquiries@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au or Philippa Duell-Piening, Victorian Refugee Health Network, 03 9389 8909.

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## Useful questions for identifying a person who is an asylum seeker

Client confidentiality is very important; be sensitive of your environment and take measures to provide a private place to talk. Furthermore an interpreter is required if a client has low English language proficiency. Consider your non verbal communication and do not ask questions in an interrogatory style.

### Prior to meeting the client:

*Who referred the client?*

*Does the client have a caseworker and what organization are they from?*

*What is the purpose of the referral?*

*Does the client require an interpreter? If so, what language? Do they have preference for gender, ethnicity or religious group?*

### Questions for a client who presents without a referral and has no Medicare card:

*"Do you need an interpreter?" (a phone interpreter should be organized if required)*

*"What is your reason for coming here today?"*

*"Do you have a Medicare card?"*

*"Do you have a healthcare card?" (if yes, this person is not an asylum seeker)*

*"Are you a tourist, international student or an asylum seeker?" (if a person is an asylum seeker see questions below)*

*"Do you have an IHMS card?" (if yes and you are not an IHMS registered provider, contact Red Cross 8327 7883)*

*"Do you have a caseworker?", "What organization is your caseworker from?" (see contact numbers listed below)*

*"Do you have a letter or other identification with you to help us understand your situation?" (see Asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria, Department of Health: [www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pch/refugee/index.htm))*

## Asylum Seeker Support Agencies

Red Cross Migration Support Programs	Casework	(03) 8327 7883
Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project	Casework	(03) 9326 8343
Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre	Legal Assistance	(03) 9413 0100 (Telephone Advice Line)
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre	Range of Support Services including Medical Care	(03) 9326 6066
AMES Settlement Services	Casework	13 26 37
Foundation House (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma – VFST)	Torture and Trauma Counselling	(03) 9388 0022 Intake Mon, Tue, Thur, Fri 9.30am-11.30am
Cardinia Casey Asylum Seeker & Refugee Health Clinic – Doveton Site	Medical Care	(03) 9212 5700 Monday

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