How to See a Specialist Through the Public Health System – Gold Standard (Upgraded)

DiversAbilities Resource – Gold Standard

1. What this service actually is (simple explanation)

A specialist is a doctor with advanced training in a specific area of the body or health condition.

For example:

- Neurologist → brain and nerves
- Paediatrician → children's health and development
- Psychiatrist → mental health (medical)
- Rehabilitation specialist → recovery after injury or disability

You usually cannot book a specialist directly in the public system. A GP decides if you need one and refers you.

2. What if I don't know what specialist I need?

This is very common — and completely okay.

You do NOT need to know which specialist to see.

Your GP will assess your situation and decide:

- whether you need a specialist
- what type of specialist is right
- how urgent your case is

3. Real-life examples

- You have ongoing pain and don't know why
- Your child is not meeting developmental milestones
- You have a long-term condition that needs specialist care
- You've been referred after tests or scans

4. Public vs Private (important difference)

Public system:

- Usually free or very low cost
- Requires GP referral
- Can have long wait times

Private system:

- Faster access
- Higher cost (gap fees)
- May still need GP referral

5. Cheapest pathway: step-by-step

1. Book a GP appointment
2. Explain your symptoms clearly
3. Ask if you need a specialist
4. Ask for referral through the PUBLIC system
5. Wait for hospital to contact you

6. What to say to your GP

- "Do I need to see a specialist for this?"
- "Can you refer me through the public system to keep costs low?"
- "Is this urgent or non-urgent?"

7. What happens after referral

Your referral is sent to a public hospital or clinic.

They review it and assign a priority level.

You are either given an appointment or placed on a waiting list.

8. What actually happens at the appointment

The specialist will review your history and ask detailed questions.

They may:

- Order tests or scans
- Provide diagnosis
- Create treatment plan
- Schedule follow-ups

9. If you are waiting too long

- Call the hospital to check status
- Ask GP to update urgency
- Ask about alternative clinics
- Consider low-cost private options

10. If your condition becomes urgent

- Go to hospital emergency department
- Call Healthdirect: 1800 022 222
- Explain symptoms clearly

11. Tips

- Be clear about symptoms
- Keep documents
- Follow up
- Ask questions

12. Official links

- Healthdirect: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au
- Find services: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services

13. Sources

- Healthdirect Australia
- State Government Health Services

Disclaimer: These resources might not be up to date and newer information might be available. We try our best to update our resources as often as possible.