

5 The patients

5.1 Characteristics of the patients at encounter

Older patients encountered were more likely to be female (59.0%) (Table 5.1). Almost 97% of encounters were with patients who had been seen previously in that practice. Two-thirds of encounters were with patients who held a health care card (66.1%), while 12.3% were with those holding a DVA card. Only 6.6% of encounters were with patients from a non-English-speaking background. Encounters with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders contributed less than 1% of encounters for all patients aged 65 and over.

Females accounted for a greater proportion of encounters in both the older age groups. However, males accounted for a greater proportion of the encounters with 65–74 year olds (43.8%) than of those with patients of 75+ years (38.5%). Patients aged 75 years and over were almost five times more likely than those of 65–74 years to hold a DVA card (19.7% compared with 4.4%). Health care cards were held by significantly more patients encountered in the 65–74 age group (68.9%) than in the older age group (63.6%).

The proportion of those who had been seen previously by the GP was very similar for both age groups (96.5% for the 65–74 age group, compared with 96.9% for those aged 75 years and over).

A notable trend (though not significantly different, probably due to the smaller sample size) was that the proportion of encounters with patients of non-English-speaking background was somewhat higher in the 65 to 74 years age group (8.1%) than in the older age group (5.2%) (Table 5.1).

5.2 Patient reasons for encounter

RFEs reflect the basis for the general practice encounter from the patient's perspective. They describe the patient's motive for seeking an encounter with the GP, and can be stated in terms of symptoms, diagnoses, or requests for particular services, for example, a request for a repeat prescription.⁷⁵

In any BEACH encounter, up to three RFEs can be recorded by the GP. A total of 80,296 RFEs were recorded at an average rate of 161.7 RFEs per 100 encounters (Table 5.2). Results in Table 5.2 are presented in terms of ICPC-2 chapter (see Chapter 2).

General and unspecified RFEs were the most frequent, recorded at an average rate of 37.6 per 100 encounters. Other RFEs that were presented to the GP relatively frequently included those related to:

- the circulatory system (25.1 per 100 encounters)
- the musculoskeletal system (19.4 per 100 encounters)
- the respiratory system (18.7 per 100 encounters)
- the skin (15.1 per 100 encounters).

Table 5.1: Characteristics of the patients at encounters

Patient variable	65–74 (n = 24,003)			75+ (n = 25,644)			All 65+ (n = 49,647)		
	Per cent of encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent of encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent of encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Sex (missing = 481)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Males	43.8	42.9	44.6	38.5	37.6	39.3	41.0	40.3	41.7
Females	56.2	55.4	57.1	61.5	60.7	62.4	59.0	58.3	59.7
Age group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
65–74 years	100.0	100.0	100.0	—	—	—	48.3	47.5	49.1
75+ years	—	—	—	100.0	100.0	100.0	51.7	50.9	52.5
Other characteristics	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
New patient to practice	3.5	2.2	4.7	3.1	1.1	5.1	3.3	2.3	4.2
Seen previously	96.5	96.2	96.9	96.9	96.5	97.3	96.7	96.4	97.1
Health care card	68.9	67.7	70.0	63.6	62.4	64.7	66.1	65.1	67.2
Veterans' Affairs card	4.4	3.7	5.0	19.7	18.9	20.6	12.3	11.8	12.8
Non-English-speaking background	8.1	3.9	12.3	5.2	2.7	7.7	6.6	4.1	9.1
Aboriginal person ^(b)	0.4	0.0	5.0	0.2	0.0	4.9	0.3	0.0	2.8
Torres Strait Islander ^(b)	0.0	0.0	7.3	0.0	0.0	4.1	0.0	0.0	2.4

(a) Missing data removed.

(b) Six patients identified themselves as both an Aboriginal person and a Torres Strait Islander.

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences between age groups. LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

Table 5.2: Patient reasons for encounter by ICPC–2 chapter

ICPC–2 chapter	65–74 (n = 24,003)			75+ (n = 25,644)			Total 65+ (n = 49,647)		
	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
General & unspecified	34.7	33.6	35.8	40.3	39.0	41.6	37.6	36.5	38.6
Circulatory	25.3	24.4	26.1	25.0	24.0	26.1	25.1	24.3	26.0
Musculoskeletal	20.6	19.8	21.4	18.3	17.7	19.0	19.4	18.9	20.0
Respiratory	20.3	19.5	21.2	17.2	16.3	18.0	18.7	18.0	19.4
Skin	14.1	13.4	14.8	16.0	15.3	16.8	15.1	14.6	15.6
Endocrine & metabolic	11.2	10.5	11.9	7.1	6.5	7.7	9.1	8.6	9.5
Digestive	9.1	8.5	9.6	8.3	7.8	8.8	8.7	8.3	9.0
Psychological	6.2	5.6	6.9	7.3	6.7	7.9	6.8	6.4	7.2
Neurological	5.1	4.6	5.6	4.9	4.4	5.3	5.0	4.7	5.2
Urology	3.3	2.7	3.9	3.6	3.2	4.1	3.5	3.2	3.7
Ear	3.1	2.6	3.7	3.1	2.7	3.6	3.1	2.9	3.4
Eye	2.9	2.3	3.4	3.0	2.6	3.5	3.0	2.7	3.2
Blood	2.6	1.8	3.4	2.6	1.9	3.3	2.6	2.2	3.0
Female genital system	2.8	2.0	3.6	1.3	0.6	2.1	2.1	1.7	2.4
Male genital system	1.4	0.5	2.2	1.0	0.3	1.8	1.2	0.8	1.6
Social problems	0.8	0.0	1.9	0.9	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.4	1.3
Total RFEs	163.5	161.8	165.2	160.1	158.2	162.0	161.7	160.1	163.4

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one reason for encounter can be recorded at each encounter.

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences between age groups. Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; RFE—reason for encounter.

RFEs of a general and unspecified nature and those associated with the skin were presented significantly more often at encounters with patients in the older age group (40.3 per 100 encounters compared with 34.7 per 100, and 16.0 per 100 compared with 14.1 per 100 respectively).

Compared with encounters with patients of 75+, encounters with those aged between 65 and 74 years were significantly more likely to include RFEs related to:

- the musculoskeletal system (20.6 per 100 encounters compared with 18.3 per 100 encounters)
- the respiratory system (20.3 per 100 encounters compared with 17.2 per 100 encounters)
- and the endocrine and metabolic systems (11.2 per 100 encounters compared with 7.1 per 100 encounters).

RFEs associated with the circulatory system ranked the second most frequent in both age groups and presented, on average, almost equally in both age groups (25.3 per 100 encounters for those aged 65 to 74, compared with 25.0 per 100 encounters for those aged 75 years and over) (Table 5.2).

5.3 Most frequent individual reasons for encounter

The most frequently recorded RFE was a request for a prescription (16.8 per 100 encounters), followed by a request for a cardiac check-up (11.9 per 100 encounters) and for vaccination (6.0 per 100 encounters) (Table 5.3).

There were very few significant differences between the two age groups when comparing individual RFEs. Requests for test results were significantly more likely in the 65–74 year age group (6.7 per 100 encounters compared with 4.4 per 100 encounters). The older cohort were significantly more likely to attend their GP for a general check-up than those aged 65–74 years (7.1 per 100 encounters compared with 3.8 per 100 encounters).

The relative rankings between the two age groups were identical for the highest ranked individual patient reasons for encounter, with requests for prescriptions heading the list in both (17.1 and 16.5 per 100 encounters respectively). While not a significant difference, it is notable that patients aged between 65 and 74 years presented to their GP with requests for immunisation, on average, slightly more often than those 75 years and over (6.7 per 100 encounters, compared with 5.3 per 100 encounters (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Most frequent individual reasons for encounter

Patient reasons for encounter	65–74 (n = 24,003)			75+ (n = 25,644)			Total 65+ (n = 49,647)		
	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Prescription all*	17.1	16.2	18.1	16.5	15.6	17.4	16.8	16.0	17.6
Cardiac check-up*	12.3	11.5	13.1	11.5	10.5	12.5	11.9	11.2	12.6
Immunisation/vaccination (all)*	6.7	4.7	8.7	5.3	3.0	7.5	6.0	4.4	7.5
Test results*	6.7	6.0	7.3	4.4	3.8	5.1	5.5	5.1	5.9
General check-up*	3.8	2.9	4.6	7.1	6.3	7.9	5.5	4.9	6.0
Hypertension	4.8	3.6	6.0	4.2	3.1	5.2	4.5	3.7	5.2
Cough	4.5	3.9	5.1	3.7	3.2	4.2	4.1	3.8	4.4
Back complaint*	3.6	2.9	4.2	3.3	2.8	3.8	3.5	3.1	3.8
Rash*	2.0	1.3	2.6	2.0	1.5	2.5	2.0	1.7	2.3
Skin symptom/complaint	1.9	0.8	3.0	2.0	1.3	2.7	1.9	1.5	2.4
Shortness of breath/dyspnoea	1.5	0.6	2.4	2.3	1.8	2.9	1.9	1.6	2.3
Diabetes*	2.3	1.4	3.2	1.6	0.9	2.3	1.9	1.5	2.4
Vertigo/dizziness	1.8	1.1	2.6	2.0	1.5	2.5	1.9	1.6	2.2
Leg/thigh symptom/complaint	1.8	1.1	2.6	1.6	1.0	2.1	1.7	1.4	2.0
Knee symptom/complaint	1.9	1.1	2.6	1.5	0.9	2.1	1.7	1.4	2.0
Sleep disturbance	1.4	0.5	2.2	1.7	0.9	2.4	1.5	1.1	1.9
Subtotal (n, %)	17,746	45.2%	—	18,105	44.1%	—	35,851	44.6%	—
Total RFEs	39,244	—	—	41,052	—	—	80,296	—	—

(a) Figures do not total to 100.0 as more than one reason for encounter can be recorded at each encounter.

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 and ICPC-2 PLUS codes.

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences between age groups. Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; RFE—reasons for encounter.