

# 9 Referrals

A referral is defined as the process by which the responsibility for part, or all, of the care of a patient is temporarily transferred to another health care provider. Only new referrals arising at the encounter were included (i.e. continuations were not recorded). For each encounter, GPs could record up to two referrals. These included referrals to specialists, allied health professionals, hospitals, emergency departments or other medical services. Referrals to hospital outpatient clinics and other GPs were classed as referrals to other medical services.

This chapter describes differences that arose across RRMA and ASGC Remoteness categories. For a summary of findings in each individual RRMA category or trends with ASGC Remoteness, please refer to Chapter 11 – Summary of results.

## 9.1 Referral rates

### RRMA

Table 9.1(a) compares referrals per 100 problems managed across RRMA categories. All differences between categories and the national average referred to here were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) unless otherwise stated.

Compared with the national average, referrals to:

- medical specialists were less common in Large Rural Centres and Other Rural Areas
- surgeons (not otherwise classified) were more common in Small Rural Centres and Other Rural Areas, with marginally (not significant) higher rates in Remote Centres and Other Remote Areas
- dermatologists and gastroenterologists were less common in the rural zone and Remote Centres
- cardiologists were less common in Large Rural Centres
- urologists were less common in Remote Centre and Other Remote Areas
- psychiatrists were less common in Other Rural Areas
- allied health professionals were more frequent in Small Rural Centres and Remote Centres
- dietitians/nutritionists were more common in Other Rural Areas
- dentists were more common in Other Remote Areas
- hospitals were more common in Other Rural and Other Remote Areas
- hospital accident and emergency departments were less common in Other Rural Areas.

### ASGC Remoteness

Table 9.1(b) compares referrals per 100 problems managed across ASGC categories. All differences between categories and the national average referred to here were statistically significant unless otherwise stated. Compared with the national average, referrals:

- to medical specialists were less common in Inner Regional Australia

- to surgeons (not otherwise classified) were more common in Inner Regional and Outer Regional Australia
- to dermatologists and gastroenterologists were less common in Inner Regional and Outer Regional Australia
- to psychiatrists were less common in Outer Regional Australia
- to hospitals were more common in Outer Regional Australia and Remote Australia, increasing with remoteness
- in total were more common in Very Remote Australia.

**Table 9.1(a): Referral rates by RRMA**

	Rate per 100 problems managed, <sup>(a)</sup> 95% confidence interval, column specific							Total (n=893,323)
	Capital City (n=589,295)	Other Metropolitan (n=66,543)	Large Rural Centre (n=57,219)	Small Rural Centre (n=56,159)	Other Rural Area (n=109,404)	Remote Centre (n=5,579)	Other Remote Area (n=9,124)	
Medical specialist	5.5 (5.4–5.6)	5.7 (5.3–6.1)	<b>4.9</b> (4.6–5.2)	5.2 (4.9–5.4)	<b>4.9</b> (4.7–5.2)	5.2 (4.2–6.2)	5.7 (4.9–6.5)	5.4 (5.3–5.5)
Surgeon NOS	0.5 (0.5–0.5)	0.6 (0.5–0.6)	0.7 (0.6–0.7)	<b>0.9</b> (0.8–1.0)	<b>0.8</b> (0.7–0.8)	0.9 (0.6–1.2)	0.8 (0.6–1.0)	0.6 (0.5–0.6)
Dermatologist	0.5 (0.5–0.5)	0.4 (0.4–0.5)	<b>0.3</b> (0.2–0.3)	<b>0.3</b> (0.2–0.3)	<b>0.2</b> (0.2–0.3)	<b>0.2</b> (0.1–0.3)	0.3 (0.1–0.4)	0.4 (0.4–0.5)
Cardiologist	0.3 (0.3–0.3)	0.4 (0.3–0.5)	<b>0.2</b> (0.1–0.2)	0.3 (0.2–0.3)	0.3 (0.2–0.3)	0.3 (0.1–0.4)	0.4 (0.2–0.6)	0.3 (0.3–0.3)
Gastroenterologist	0.3 (0.3–0.3)	0.3 (0.3–0.4)	<b>0.2</b> (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.1</b> (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.2</b> (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.1</b> (0.0–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.3)	0.3 (0.3–0.3)
Urologist	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.1</b> (0.0–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
Psychiatrist	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.1</b> (0.1–0.1)	0.2 (0.1–0.4)	0.1 (0.0–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
Allied health services	1.9 (1.8–1.9)	1.9 (1.7–2.1)	1.9 (1.7–2.1)	<b>2.3</b> (2.1–2.5)	2.2 (2.0–2.4)	<b>2.8</b> (2.2–3.5)	2.2 (1.7–2.7)	2.0 (1.9–2.0)
Dietitian/nutritionist	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	<b>0.2</b> (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.4)	0.1 (0.0–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)
Dentist	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.2 (0.0–0.3)	<b>0.3</b> (0.2–0.4)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)
Hospital	0.4 (0.3–0.4)	0.5 (0.3–0.7)	0.4 (0.3–0.5)	0.5 (0.4–0.5)	<b>0.7</b> (0.6–0.8)	1.3 (0.5–2.2)	<b>1.0</b> (0.6–1.4)	0.4 (0.4–0.5)
Accident & emergency department	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.1)	<b>0.0<sup>‡</sup></b>	0.1 (0.0–0.3)	0.1 (0.0–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)
Other referral	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.3 (0.1–0.4)	0.3 (0.1–0.5)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
<b>Total referrals</b>	<b>8.0</b> (7.8–8.1)	<b>8.4</b> (7.9–9.0)	<b>7.5</b> (7.1–7.9)	<b>8.2</b> (7.8–8.6)	<b>8.1</b> (7.7–8.4)	<b>9.8</b> (8.1–11.5)	<b>9.3</b> (8.1–10.5)	<b>8.0</b> (7.9–8.2)

(a) Figures do not total 100 as more than referral can be given at each encounter and for each problem.

‡ Rates are reported to one decimal place (n=38).

Note: Shading indicates a significant difference between a RRMA and Australia (total sample). Darker shading indicates a higher than average result and lighter shading indicates a lower than average result.  
NOS—not otherwise specified.

**Table 9.1(b): Referral rates by ASGC Remoteness**

	Rate per 100 problems managed, <sup>(a)</sup> 95% confidence interval, column specific					
	Major Cities (n=616,852)	Inner Regional Australia (n=175,944)	Outer Regional Australia (n=84,760)	Remote Australia (n=11,924)	Very Remote Australia (n=3,843)	Total (n=893,323)
Medical specialist	5.5 (5.4–5.6)	5.0 (4.9–5.2)	5.0 (4.7–5.3)	5.1 (4.4–5.8)	6.2 (5.0–7.3)	5.4 (5.3–5.5)
Surgeon NOS	0.5 (0.5–0.5)	0.7 (0.7–0.8)	0.8 (0.7–0.9)	0.7 (0.6–0.9)	0.9 (0.6–1.3)	0.6 (0.5–0.6)
Dermatologist	0.5 (0.5–0.5)	0.3 (0.3–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.3)	0.2 (0.1–0.4)	0.3 (0.0–0.5)	0.4 (0.4–0.5)
Cardiologist	0.3 (0.3–0.3)	0.3 (0.2–0.3)	0.3 (0.2–0.3)	0.2 (0.1–0.3)	0.6 (0.2–1.1)	0.3 (0.3–0.3)
Gastroenterologist	0.3 (0.3–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.3)	0.2 (0.0–0.3)	0.3 (0.3–0.3)
Urologist	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.2)	0.1 (0.0–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
Psychiatrist	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.2)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.1 (0.0–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
Allied health services	1.9 (1.8–1.9)	2.2 (2.0–2.3)	2.1 (2.0–2.3)	2.6 (2.0–3.1)	2.2 (1.3–3.1)	2.0 (1.9–2.0)
Hospital	0.4 (0.3–0.4)	0.5 (0.4–0.5)	0.7 (0.6–0.8)	1.2 (0.6–1.7)	1.3 (0.4–2.1)	0.4 (0.4–0.5)
Accident & emergency department	0.1 (0.1–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.1)	0.1 (0.0–0.10)	0.2 (0.0–0.4)	0.1 (0.1–0.1)
Other referral	0.2 (0.1–0.2)	0.2 (0.2–0.3)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)	0.2 (0.1–0.3)	0.5 (0.0–1.0)	0.2 (0.2–0.2)
<b>Total referrals</b>	<b>8.0</b> <b>(7.9–8.2)</b>	<b>8.0</b> <b>(7.7–8.2)</b>	<b>8.1</b> <b>(7.7–8.4)</b>	<b>9.1</b> <b>(8.0–10.2)</b>	<b>10.3</b> <b>(8.3–12.3)</b>	<b>8.0</b> <b>(7.9–8.2)</b>

(a) Figures do not total 100 as more than referral can be given at each encounter and for each problem.

Note: Shading indicates a significant difference between an ASGC and Australia (total sample). Darker shading indicates a higher than average result and lighter shading indicates a lower than average result.  
NOS—not otherwise specified