

5 The patients

5.1 Patient characteristics by patient sex

Table 5.1 shows that the age distribution of male patients at GP encounters was significantly different from that of female patients. Of the males, 17.7% were under 15 years of age; in contrast, only 12.6% of females were in this age group. However, male patients were less likely to be aged between 15–44 years (33.0%) than were females (39.4%). Male patients were more likely to be aged 45–74 years (38.3%) than females (35.3%) and less likely to be aged 75+ at the time of encounter (11.2%) than females (12.8%). The age–sex distribution of patients at encounter is graphically represented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.2 shows the age-specific sex distribution of patients at encounter. Males accounted for a larger proportion of encounters with patients aged under 5 years than did females. The proportion of male and female patients between 5 and 14 years of age was evenly distributed. However, from the age of 15 years onward, female patients accounted for a larger proportion of consultations than did male patients. This difference was most marked in the age groups 15–44 years and 75+ years, where female patients presented at more than 60% of encounters.

There was no significant difference between encounters with male and female patients in the extent to which the patient was new to the practice. However, a significantly lower proportion of males held a health care card (36.2 per 100 encounters) than their female counterparts (40.7). In contrast, males were far more likely to hold a Commonwealth Veterans' Affairs gold card (4.1 per 100 encounters) than were females (1.5). Very few of both sexes held a Commonwealth Veterans Affairs' white card.

There were no significant differences between the sexes across the patient categories of non-English-speaking background, Aboriginal status, Torres Strait Islander status and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Patient characteristics by patient sex

Patient variable	Male (n = 44,308)			Female (n = 59,366)		
	Rate per 100 encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Age group	..	..	..	..	..	..
< 1 year	2.9	2.5	3.2	2.0	1.7	2.2
1–4 years	6.4	6.0	6.9	4.3	3.9	4.6
5–14 years	8.4	8.0	8.9	6.3	5.9	6.6
15–24 years	9.3	8.8	9.8	11.2	10.7	11.7
25–44 years	23.7	22.8	24.5	28.2	27.3	29.0
45–64 years	25.3	24.6	26.0	24.0	23.4	24.6
65–74 years	13.0	12.3	13.5	11.3	10.8	11.9
75+ years	11.2	10.4	11.9	12.8	12.0	13.7
Missing age	(288)	..	..	(382)	..	..
Other characteristics	..	..	..	..	..	..
New patient to practice	8.1	7.2	9.0	6.7	6.0	7.3
Health care card holder	36.2	34.5	37.8	40.7	39.0	42.4
Veterans' Affairs gold card	4.1	3.5	4.7	1.5	1.1	1.9
Veterans' Affairs white card	0.5	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.0	0.8
Non-English-speaking background	8.1	4.0	12.2	7.9	4.4	11.4
Aboriginal	0.6	0.0	2.2	0.7	0.0	0.2
Torres Strait Islander	0.1	0.0	1.6	*	**	**
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	*	**	**	*	**	**

(a) Missing data removed.

* Less than 0.05 per 100 encounters.

** CL could not be calculated due to small sample size.

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

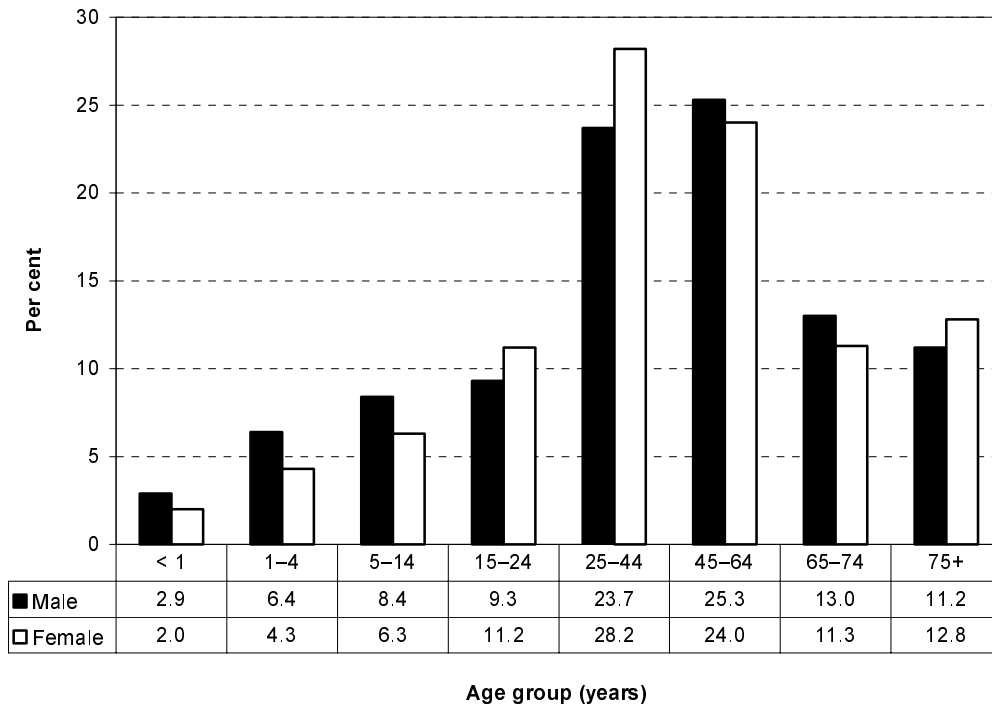


Figure 5.1: Age distribution of patients at encounter by patient sex

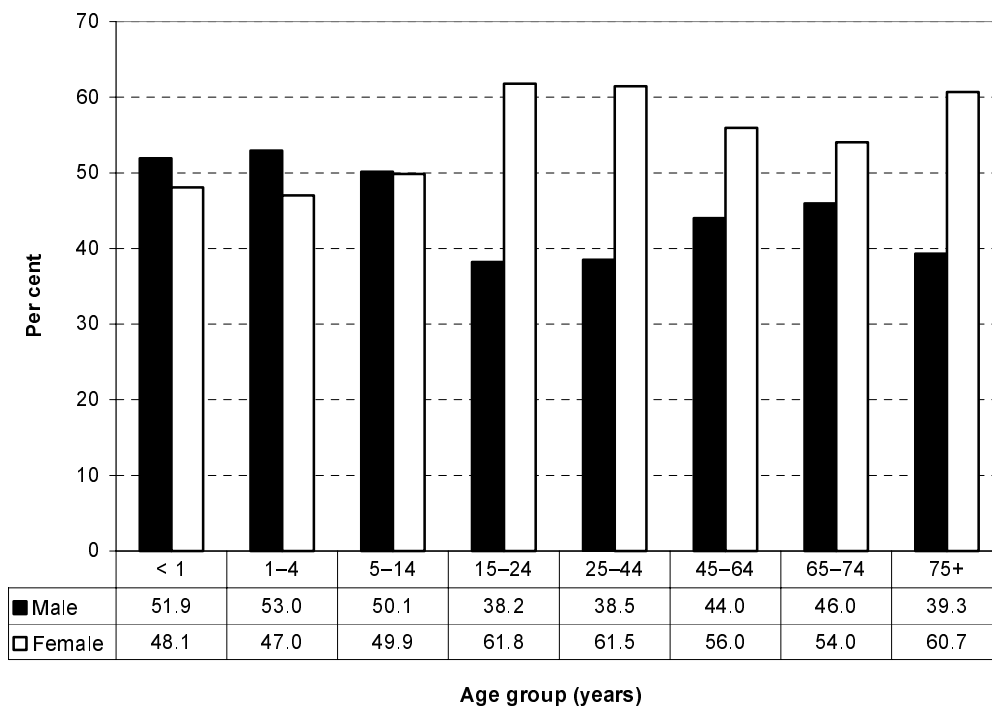


Figure 5.2: Age-sex-specific distribution of patients at encounter

5.2 Proportion of Australian population attending GPs

Figure 5.3 shows the proportion of the Australian population (based on 1999 population estimates)⁵⁶ that attended a GP at least once in 2000–01 (Medicare data supplied by the GP Branch of the DHAC), by age and sex. Overall a lower proportion of males in the population attended a GP at least once in the year (76%) compared with females (87%). Comparable proportions of boys and girls aged less than 15 years attended a GP at least once in that year. In older age groups, a lower proportion of males than females attended a GP, with the exception of the 70–74 age group. The most marked difference between males and females occurred between 15 and 39 years, where less than 75% of males attended a GP compared with 80–90% of females.

Figure 5.4 shows the estimated age–sex-specific rate of GP attendances for the Australian population. This rate is based on 1999 Australian population estimates⁵⁶ and the 2000–01 count of total A1 Medicare items claimed (data supplied by the GP branch of the DHAC). Australian males had lower average yearly rates of GP service use (5.1 services) than Australian females (6.2 services). Until the age of 15 years, the male and female average rate of use of GP services showed little difference. However, for 15–19 year olds the average rate of use of GP services was much lower for males (2.3 services) than for females (3.7 services). This pattern remained constant for males throughout all the remaining age groups. The largest differences in male and female attendance rates were in the age groups between 15 and 39 years and over 75 years, where males used an average of two services fewer than females per year.

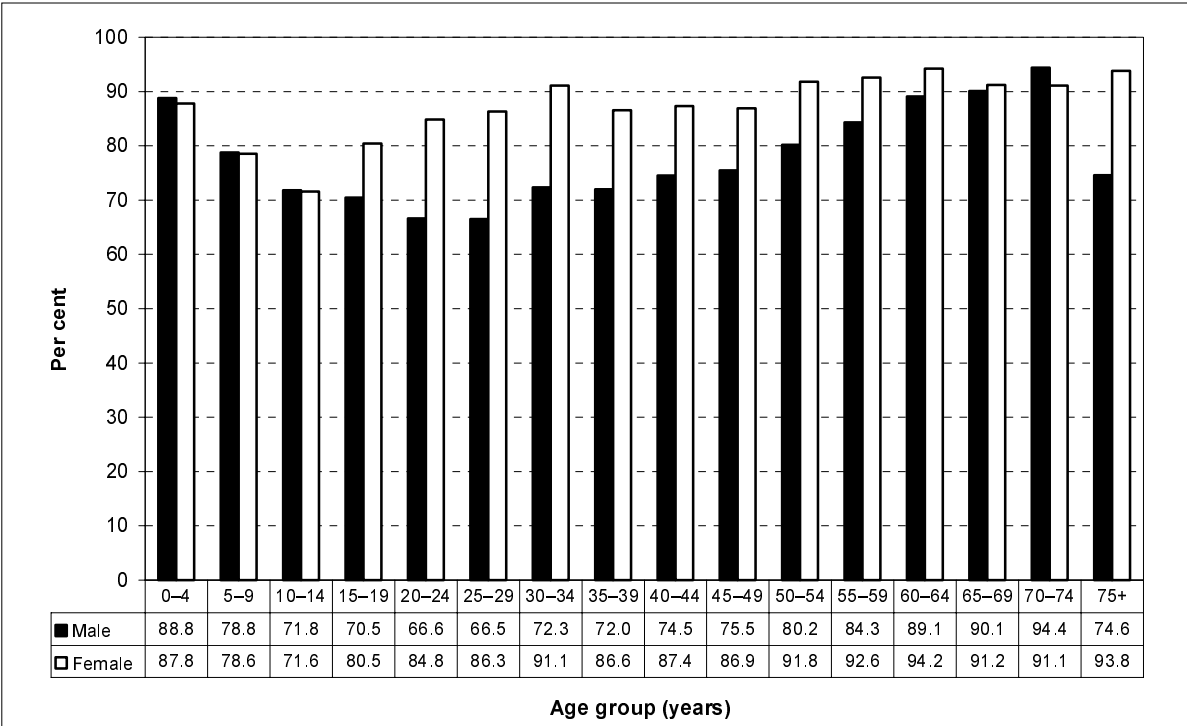


Figure 5.3: Proportion of total Australians (1999) who attended general practice at least once in 2000-01 by age and sex

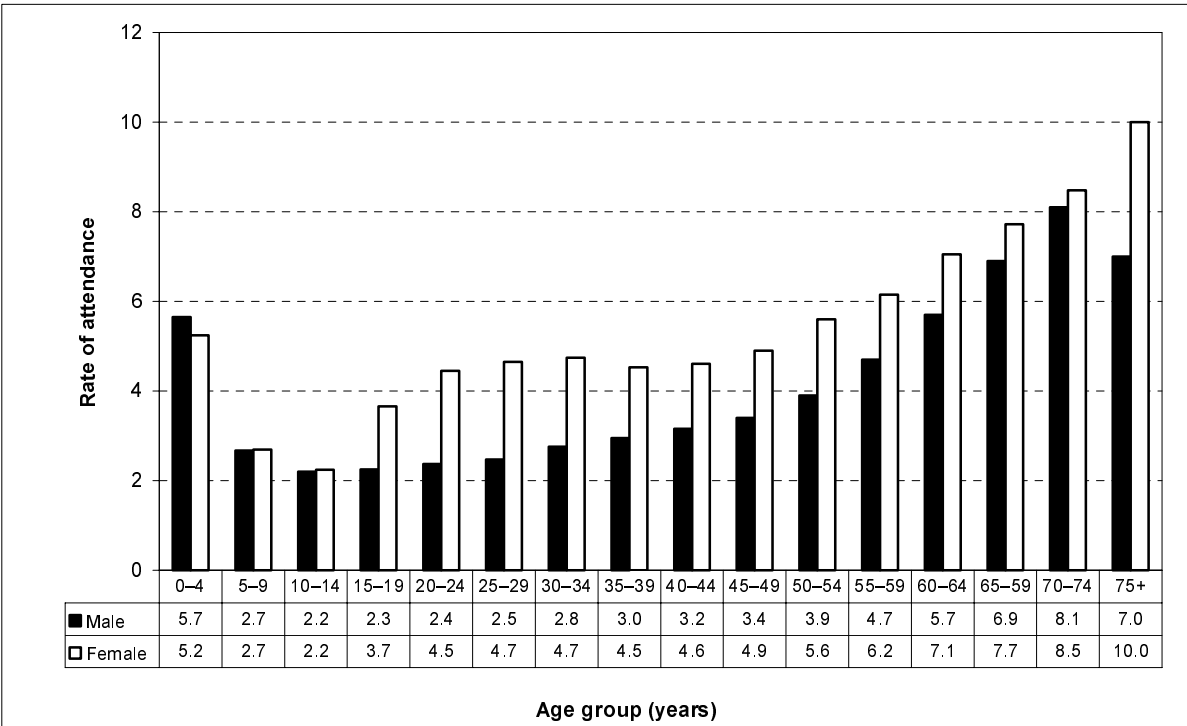


Figure 5.4: Age-sex-specific rate of average annual general practice attendances in 2000-01 for the Australian population (1999)

5.3 Patient reasons for encounter by patient sex

Reasons for encounter by ICPC-2 chapter by patient sex

Reasons for encounter (RFEs) are those concerns and expectations which patients consider to be the reason they have made contact with the GP. These RFEs can be expressed as symptoms, in diagnostic terms, as areas of concern or as requests for a service⁴⁹.

Table 5.2 compares the distribution of RFEs by ICPC-2 chapter for male and female patients. The results are presented in rank order for male encounters. The six most frequent RFEs were common to both male and female patients. There were four RFEs (classified by ICPC-2 chapter) that were recorded significantly more often at encounters with male patients than at those with female patients.

- The rate for respiratory RFEs was 26.6 per 100 male encounters, compared with 24.3 for female encounters.
- RFEs classified as musculoskeletal were significantly more common at encounters with male patients (18.4 per 100 encounters) than at those with females (15.2 per 100).
- RFEs associated with the skin occurred at the rate of 16.6 per 100 encounters in male patients compared with 14.1 per 100 for female patients.
- RFEs related to the ear were significantly more frequent at encounters with male patients (4.9 per 100 encounters) than at those with females (3.6).

RFEs that were recorded significantly less often at encounters with males included those:

- related to the neurological system (5.0 per 100 compared with 6.0 per 100 encounters with females)
- associated with the genital system (2.4 per 100 male encounters compared with 9.3 females encounters)
- associated with the urinary system (1.7 per 100 encounters with male patients compared with 3.3 for those with female patients).

There were no significant differences between the sexes in the relative rates of RFEs associated with the circulatory, digestive, endocrine and metabolic systems, nor in those of a general or psychological nature.

Table 5.2: Comparison of the distribution of patient reasons for encounter by ICPC-2 chapter for encounters with males and females (in rank order for male encounters)

ICPC-2 chapter	Male (n = 44,308)				Female (n = 59,366)			
	Rank	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rank	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
General & unspecified	1	30.0	28.9	31.0	1	28.3	27.3	29.2
Respiratory	2	26.6	25.6	27.7	2	24.3	23.4	25.3
Musculoskeletal	3	18.4	17.8	19.1	3	15.2	14.7	15.7
Skin	4	16.6	16.0	17.2	4	14.1	13.6	14.5
Circulatory	5	11.7	10.9	12.5	5	10.9	10.2	11.5
Digestive	6	10.7	10.2	11.1	6	10.2	9.8	10.6
Psychological	7	6.8	6.2	7.4	8	7.5	7.1	7.9
Endocrine & metabolic	8	5.7	5.3	6.1	11	5.2	4.8	5.6
Neurological	9	5.0	4.6	5.3	10	6.0	5.7	6.3
Ear	10	4.9	4.6	5.2	12	3.6	3.4	3.8
Eye	11	3.1	2.8	3.3	14	2.7	2.4	2.9
Genital system	12	2.4	2.1	2.6	7	9.3	8.7	9.9
Blood	13	2.3	1.8	2.7	15	1.9	1.7	2.2
Urology	14	1.7	1.4	2.0	13	3.3	3.1	3.5
Social problems	15	0.9	0.2	1.5	16	1.0	0.8	1.2
Pregnancy & family planning	—	—	—	—	9	6.7	6.1	7.2
Total RFEs (n)	64,932	146.6	144.7	148.4	89,051	150.0	148.2	151.8

(a) Figures do not total 100 as more than one reason for encounter can be recorded at each encounter.

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

The most frequent patient reasons for encounter by patient sex

Table 5.3 shows the most frequent RFEs by patient sex in rank order for encounters with males. The three most frequent RFEs, common to both female and male patients showed no significant differences between the sexes. These were requests for a prescription; a cough; and a request for a cardiac check-up (often a blood pressure check).

RFEs more commonly recorded at encounters with male patients were:

- back complaints (4.2 per 100 male encounters compared with 3.2 per female encounters)
- request for a general check-up (3.9 per 100 encounters with male patients, compared with 2.8 with female patients).

Requests for a genital check-up occurred at a significantly lower rate at encounters with male patients (only 0.2 per 100 encounters) than at those with female patients (2.9 per 100).

Table 5.3: The ten most frequent patient reasons for encounter, by patient sex (in rank order for male reasons for encounter)

Patient reasons for encounter	Male (n = 44,308)				Female (n = 59,366)			
	Rank	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rank	Rate per 100 encs ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Prescription (all)*	1	9.2	8.5	9.8	1	10.0	9.4	10.5
Cough	2	7.6	7.0	8.2	2	6.6	6.1	7.1
Cardiac check*	3	5.7	5.1	6.3	3	5.5	5.0	5.9
Immunisation/vaccination (all)*	4	4.5	3.9	5.0	6	4.0	3.6	4.5
Back complaint*	5	4.2	3.8	4.5	7	3.2	3.0	3.4
Throat complaint	6	4.1	3.6	4.6	4	4.3	3.8	4.7
General check-up*	7	3.9	3.5	4.4	9	2.8	2.4	3.1
Test results*	8	3.7	3.2	4.1	5	4.2	3.8	4.6
Rash*	9	2.8	2.6	3.1	11	2.6	2.4	2.8
Upper respiratory tract infection	10	2.8	2.2	3.4	10	2.7	2.2	3.1
**Genital check-up*	121	0.2	0.0	1.0	8	2.9	2.4	3.3
<i>Subtotal (n, %)</i>	<i>21,561</i>	<i>33.2</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>28,918</i>	<i>32.5</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>
Total RFEs (n)	64,932	146.6	144.7	148.4	89,051	150.0	148.2	151.8

(a) Figures do not total 100 as more than one reason for encounter can be recorded at each encounter. Also only those RFEs that accounted for a rate of > 1% of total encounters for either sex are included.

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 and ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 3).

** Indicates a RFE occurring in one of the ten most frequently recorded RFEs for female patients, not occurring in the ten most frequently recorded RFEs for male patients.

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences. LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; RFEs—reasons for encounter.