

# 11 Referrals and admissions

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 (that is, continuations were not recorded). For each encounter, GPs could record up to two referrals. These included referrals to specialists, allied health professionals, hospitals for admission, emergency departments or other medical services. Referrals to hospital outpatient clinics and other GPs were classified as referrals to other medical services.

Data on referrals and admissions are reported for each year from 1998–99 to 2007–08 in the 10 year summary report *General practice activity in Australia 1998–99 to 2007–08: 10 year data tables* available from <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19)> (AIHW catalogue number GEP 23).

## 11.1 Number of referrals and admissions

Table 11.1 provides a summary of referrals and admissions, and the rates per 100 encounters and per 100 problems for which referrals were provided. The patient was given at least one referral at 11.8% of all encounters, and for 8.3% of all problems managed. The most frequent referrals were to specialists, followed by referrals to allied health services. Very few patients were referred to hospitals, to the hospital emergency department or to other medical services.

**Table 11.1: Summary of referrals and admissions**

Variable	Number	Rate per 100 encounters ( <i>n</i> = 95,898)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 problems ( <i>n</i> = 145,078)	95% LCL	95% UCL
At least one referral <sup>(a)</sup>	11,302	11.8	11.3	12.2	8.3	8.0	8.6
Referrals	12,008	12.5	12.0	13.0	8.3	8.0	8.6
Specialist	7,647	8.0	7.6	8.3	5.3	5.1	5.5
Allied health service	3,305	3.4	3.2	3.7	2.3	2.1	2.4
Hospital	381	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.3
Emergency department	210	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2
Other medical services	83	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Other referrals	382	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.3

(a) Rate per 100 problems for at least one referral is calculated using a numerator of number of individual problems with a referral (*n* = 11,277).

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

## 11.2 Most frequent referrals

There were 12,008 referrals to other health services, at a rate of 12.5 per 100 encounters. Table 11.2 shows the specialists and allied health service groups to whom GPs most often referred. The most common referrals were to surgeons (11%), orthopaedic surgeons (9%), dermatologists (8%) and ophthalmologists (8%). About 34% of referrals to allied health

services were to physiotherapists, 19% to psychologists, 9% to podiatrists or chiropractors and 7% to dietitians or nutritionists.

**Table 11.2: The most frequent referrals, by type**

Professional/organisation	Number	Per cent of referrals	Per cent of referral group	Rate per 100 encounters (n = 95,898)	95% LCL	95% UCL
<b>Medical specialist</b>	<b>7,647</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>8.3</b>
Surgeon	803	6.7	10.5	0.8	0.8	0.9
Orthopaedic surgeon	653	5.4	8.6	0.7	0.6	0.7
Dermatologist	634	5.3	8.3	0.7	0.6	0.7
Ophthalmologist	631	5.3	8.3	0.7	0.6	0.7
Cardiologist	521	4.3	6.8	0.5	0.5	0.6
Ear, nose and throat	492	4.1	6.4	0.5	0.5	0.6
Gastroenterologist	476	4.0	6.2	0.5	0.4	0.6
Gynaecologist	419	3.5	5.5	0.4	0.4	0.5
Urologist	278	2.3	3.6	0.3	0.3	0.3
Paediatrician	224	1.9	2.9	0.2	0.2	0.3
<i>Subtotal: top 10 specialist referrals</i>	<i>5,133</i>	<i>42.7</i>	<i>67.1</i>	—	—	—
<b>Allied health and other professionals</b>	<b>3,305</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>
Physiotherapy	1,132	9.4	34.3	1.2	1.1	1.3
Psychologist	635	5.3	19.2	0.7	0.6	0.7
Podiatrist/chiropracist	299	2.5	9.0	0.3	0.3	0.4
Dietitian/nutritionist	215	1.8	6.5	0.2	0.2	0.3
Dentist	178	1.5	5.4	0.2	0.1	0.2
Audiologist	98	0.8	3.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Optometrist	79	0.7	2.4	0.1	0.1	0.1
Breast clinic	67	0.6	2.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Diabetes education	64	0.5	2.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Counsellor	62	0.5	1.9	0.1	0.0	0.1
<i>Subtotal: top 10 allied health referrals</i>	<i>2,830</i>	<i>23.6</i>	<i>85.6</i>	—	—	—
<b>Total referrals</b>	<b>12,008</b>	<b>100.0</b>	—	<b>12.5</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

## 11.3 Problems most often referred

A referral to a specialist was provided in the management of 7,820 problems. The 10 problems most commonly referred to a specialist accounted for 19.5% of all problems referred to a specialist, and those most often referred were pregnancy (3.1% of problems referred to a specialist), diabetes, malignant skin neoplasm and osteoarthritis (Table 11.3).

Table 11.3 also shows the rate of referral per 100 contacts for each problem. Pregnancy and malignant neoplasm were the problem most likely to result in a referral to a specialist.

**Table 11.3: The 10 problems most frequently referred to a medical specialist**

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems referred	Rate per 100 encs (n = 95,898)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 contacts of this problem <sup>(a)</sup>
Pregnancy*	238	3.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	18.6
Diabetes—all*	226	2.9	0.2	0.2	0.3	6.1
Malignant skin neoplasm	214	2.7	0.2	0.2	0.3	18.7
Osteoarthritis*	155	2.0	0.2	0.1	0.2	6.2
Back complaint*	138	1.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	5.3
Sleep disturbance	117	1.5	0.1	0.1	0.2	7.6
Depression*	114	1.5	0.1	0.1	0.2	3.0
Ischaemic heart disease*	112	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	10.7
Abnormal test results*	105	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	10.8
Oesophagus disease	103	1.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	4.7
<i>Subtotal: top 10 problems referred to a specialist</i>	<i>1,522</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>
<b>Total problems referred to specialist</b>	<b>7,820</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>—</b>

(a) The rate of referrals to medical specialists per 100 contacts with the problem.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19)>).

Note: Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

There were 3,422 problems referred to an allied health professional or service. The 10 most common of these accounted for 47.9% of all problems referred to allied health services, with depression the most common. However, the problem most likely to result in a referral to an allied health service was teeth/gum disease, with more than one in four contacts resulting in referral (Table 11.4).

**Table 11.4: The 10 problems most frequently referred to allied health services**

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems referred	Rate per 100 encs (n = 95,898)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 contacts of this problem <sup>(a)</sup>
Depression*	414	12.1	0.4	0.4	0.5	10.8
Back complaint*	273	8.0	0.3	0.2	0.3	10.4
Sprain/strain*	206	6.0	0.2	0.2	0.3	13.7
Diabetes—all*	197	5.8	0.2	0.2	0.3	5.3
Anxiety*	131	3.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	7.7
Teeth/gum disease	121	3.5	0.1	0.1	0.2	28.8
Osteoarthritis*	109	3.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	4.4
Musculoskeletal injury NOS	65	1.9	0.1	0.1	0.1	7.8
Bursitis/tendonitis/synovitis NOS	64	1.9	0.1	0.1	0.1	8.1
Obesity	60	1.7	0.1	0.0	0.1	8.7
<i>Subtotal: top 10 problems referred to AHS</i>	<i>1,639</i>	<i>47.9</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>
<b>Total problems referred to AHS</b>	<b>3,422</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>—</b>

(a) The rate of referrals to allied health services per 100 contacts with the problem.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19)>).

Note: Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; NOS—not otherwise specified; AHS—allied health service.

The 10 problems most frequently referred to hospital are shown in Table 11.5. Pregnancy was the most common. However, appendicitis was the problem most likely to be referred, with one in four contacts being referred to hospital.

**Table 11.5: The 10 problems most frequently referred to hospital**

<b>Problem managed</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent of problems referred</b>	<b>Rate per 100 encs (n = 95,898)</b>	<b>95% LCL</b>	<b>95% UCL</b>	<b>Rate per 100 contacts of this problem<sup>(a)</sup></b>
Pregnancy*	33	8.4	0.03	0.02	0.05	2.6
Appendicitis	13	3.3	0.01	0.01	0.02	25.4
Pneumonia	13	3.3	0.01	0.01	0.02	4.7
Fracture*	12	3.1	0.01	0.00	0.02	1.3
Phlebitis/thrombophlebitis	8	2.1	0.01	0.00	0.02	3.2
Stroke/cerebrovascular accident	8	2.0	0.01	0.00	0.02	3.7
Atrial fibrillation/flutter	7	1.9	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.8
Skin infection, other	7	1.9	0.01	0.00	0.02	2.6
Abortion, spontaneous	7	1.7	0.01	0.00	0.01	8.1
Heart failure	6	1.6	0.01	0.00	0.01	1.1
<i>Subtotal: top 10 problems referred for admission</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>29.5</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>
<b>Total problems referred to hospital</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>—</b>

(a) The rate of referrals to hospital per 100 contacts with the problem.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19)>).

Note: Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.