

Explaining Divisions: An Orientation Workshop for Consumer and Community Representative

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About General Practice



Photo Courtesy Sale Family Medical Centre

Who sees General Practitioners?

General Practitioners (GPs) provide comprehensive and continuing care to individuals and families in a community setting.

GPs play important roles in Australian health care systems. They are the primary medical providers who are most likely to be in contact with most Australians and to offer them care over an extended period of time.

Patient surveys generally show that people trust GPs' advice and value having a regular GP. More than 85% of people in Australia see a GP at least annually and on average they visit their GP more than 5 times each year.

What types of care do GPs provide?

GP care may include:

- preventive care such as immunisation, screening for early signs of disease or the provision of patient education about preventing the onset or further development of disease.
- treatment of episodic illness
- coordination of other medical services for people who have complex or chronic health conditions.

Some GPs have additional roles for example in providing hospital- based care as Visiting Medical Officers in country hospitals. Some GP practices include a focus on a special area of interest such as sports medicine, occupational medicine, women's health or counselling in addition to family medicine.

What is an average GP practice like?

Around Australia GPs work an average of 51 hours per week, about 42 hours of which are spent in seeing patients. This average increases to 56 hours per week for men GPs working in rural areas. On average women GPs work between 33 and 43 hours per week depending on their geographical location. The average general practice in metropolitan areas has 3 GPs working together and in rural areas the average is 2 GPs working together. There continue to be practices where GPs work alone.

Most GPs are private practitioners who charge patient fees for their consultations. In 1999 more than 90% of all consultations by GPs attracted a patient fee subsidy through Medicare.

Accreditation of general practices has been an important quality initiative introduced in 1997 and supported by divisions. A GP practice wishing to become accredited has to meet a number of requirements relating to the facilities and equipment of the practice and the way GP care is delivered. More than 75 % of general practices in Victoria are now involved in accreditation.

A useful source of in depth information about General Practice which is relevant to the work of divisions can be found in “General Practice in Australia :2000” General Practice Branch, Department of Health and Aged Care.

What is a Division of General Practice?



Photo Courtesy Southcity GP Services

Divisions of General Practice are local organisations of GPs. They are membership based and are overseen by elected Boards of Directors. Most Victorian divisions' Boards are made up exclusively of GPs. GP membership of divisions is voluntary. Most divisions do not charge GP membership fees. Divisions depend for their success on the interest and willingness of GPs to become involved in division programs and activities. Divisions regularly consult with their members about the nature and design of their activities

There are 121 divisions of general practice across Australia with 30 in Victoria, of which 15 are in metropolitan Melbourne and 15 in rural and regional areas of the state.

Divisions were first formed in 1992 with the aim of encouraging GPs to work together with other health professionals at the local level to upgrade the quality of health service delivery and thereby to improve health outcomes for patients.

Where does Divisions funding come from?

Divisions of General Practice receive core funding from the Department of Health and Ageing through triennium funding contracts. The current contracts expire on 30 June 2003. Divisions' funding is one component of a raft of Commonwealth initiatives that support General Practice. The national allocation for core funding for divisions is about \$90 million per annum across Australia. The amount of core funding each division receives is based on their geography and population. The core budgets of Victorian divisions range from about \$300,000 per annum to approximately \$850,000 per annum.

In addition to core funding divisions receive funding from time to time to participate in national programs. In the past, these have included programs: -

- to increase child and adult immunisation rates,
- to increase the use of information technology in general practice,
- to improve the adoption by GPs of agreed clinical guidelines for managing certain diseases such as diabetes and asthma,
- to encourage GPs to work in rural and remote areas of Australia,
- to introduce GPs to changes in the Medicare Benefits Schedule

Integral to many programs is the important role Divisions play in providing ongoing professional development activities for General Practitioners and their practice staff.

Divisions are able to compete for funding from Commonwealth, State and other sources. Divisions can submit tenders and expressions of interest for publicly advertised funding grants.

Each division in Victoria has a website and most produce a regular monthly newsletter. These provide easily accessible methods of finding out more about their individual programs and activities. All divisions' websites can be accessed through the www.gpdv.com.au website.

Further information about the activities of divisions across Australia is available through the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service, Department of General Practice, Flinders University. Access their website at www.phcris.org.au

Who is in a Divisions “Community of Interest”?



Photo Courtesy of AMA (Western Australia)



Photo Courtesy Katherine West Health Board

Divisions are responsive firstly to their local GP members. Membership numbers vary and membership is voluntary. One rural division in Victoria has a catchment of 74 GPs working in 12 practices. Another metropolitan division has catchment of 129 GPs working in 63 practices. GPs may be members of more than one division.

There is great diversity among GPs. Division membership may include:

- GPs who own their own practice (referred to as practice principals),
- GPs who work as associates or employees in private practice,
- GPs who work in salaried positions in private practice or community health centres, GPs who combine clinical with academic or research work,
- GPs who work in Aboriginal community controlled health services and so on.

GPs professional interests are diverse. Many divisions have a strong commitment to working with practice managers and nurses employed by GPs as well as with GPs themselves.

Divisions receive substantial funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and are accountable to that department for activities described in strategic, business and financial plans that form part of their funding contracts with the department. Many of these activities are aligned with national goals and targets set for divisions' work.

The Victorian Department of Human Services takes an interest in the work of divisions and from time to time provides funding for division based programs in line with statewide goals and targets. Divisions are involved in ongoing collaboration with statewide and regional health planning groups auspiced by the state government.

Within their local region Divisions are connected to local government through municipal health planning and local health promotion activities. Divisions are often represented on the Boards of Management of local and regional organisations or on local advisory or reference groups.

Divisions strive to be well informed about the health needs of the diverse population groups that make up their local communities. Victorian divisions have conducted a wide range of local programs which support GP outreach to people who may benefit from improved access to GP services including refugees, young people, Aboriginal Victorians, people whose first language is one other than English and people who are homeless.

More than 70% of Victorian divisions have a Consumer or Community Advisory Group to provide direct input to the division about the health needs of local communities and about how divisions might best structure their GP outreach and community education activities.

GPs themselves feel a strong connection with the people they see in their practice (their practice population) and form a rich knowledge base over time about the common and complex health problems being experienced in that community.

GPs bring this knowledge with them to their work with divisions.

What issues do GPs and Community Members have in Common?



Photo courtesy of Central Bayside Division

There are many issues that GPs and their patients have in common although they experience them differently. Here are some examples:

CLINICAL ISSUES

For GPs

Some clinical issues are complicated for patients to understand. Research shows patients often do not remember important advice given verbally in the consultation. Doctors rely on take home patient information materials.

For consumers

Patients want their GP to clearly explain treatments, medications, possible complications and so on. Doctors time is limited and patients recall for what is said in the consultation is also limited.

COMMON NEEDS

Good quality information sources that meet both GP requirements for soundness and patient requirements for "accessibility"

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

For GPs

GPs want to understand what personal, social and financial factors prevent patients from following medical advice, what factors help people manage chronic illness more effectively and so on.

For consumers

Consumer want GPs to understand what helps and what hinders them from managing ill health or preventing illness, to communicate with them effectively and not to give impractical advice.

Opportunities to share each others experience and understanding of the GP/patient consultation

REFERRAL TO OTHER SERVICES

For GPs

GPs want to make quick and effective patient referrals to health and community services and to be advised of the outcome of these referrals by other service providers

For consumers

Consumers want their GP to refer them to community and other health services that are accessible, affordable and do not have long waiting times. Consumers would prefer not to have to explain their health problems over and over again to a variety of service providers.

Accurate service directories. Agreed and effective referral processes. Systems for sharing patient information when the patient consents.

How do divisions learn about Community Issues?



Photo courtesy Mornington Peninsula Division of General Practice

Divisions strive to be very well informed about community health needs and issues in both their local communities and more broadly. Divisions rely on regional health needs surveys and studies conducted by local government, by hospital networks, by state government and by research and health promotion organisations. From time to time divisions may commission their own studies or provide input into those being done by others.

Divisions provide representatives to many organisations and committees that operate at the local level including

- Local government health planning groups
- Regional health promotion groups
- Inter-agency committees like Victorian Primary Care Partnership committees
- Boards of management
- Ongoing program reference group or service advisory committees
- Short term working parties and reference groups

In this way division members and staff are exposed to a wealth of information and views about community health issues and how they should be addressed. They have the opportunity to discuss and debate how GPs can best contribute to meeting health needs and to receive input from consumers and other service providers.

As described in the information sheet “What are the roles of consumer and community representatives in divisions?” there are a variety of ways in which divisions actively seek direct input from community members. For example, in Victoria over 70% of divisions have their own Consumer or Community Advisory Group.

In some areas divisions work closely with specific organisations which are strongly connected to people who have difficulty in accessing GP services. In Victoria divisions have worked with the Foundation for Survivors of Torture to improve the accessibility and quality of general practice care for refugees. Ongoing efforts are made between Aboriginal community controlled health services and divisions to improve the provision of general practice services to Aboriginal community members. Divisions have formed active partnerships with schools and have provided school based workshops for young adolescents about how to use GP services effectively. Divisions have worked with young people to provide advice to GPs on how to ensure their practices are “youth friendly”.

The publication “Practices, partnerships and population health: Report on the 2000-2001 Annual Survey of Divisions of General Practice”, C. Modra and E. Kalucy, Primary Health Care Research & Information Service, 2002 provides more detail of the range of ways in which divisions relate to their communities.

Roles of Community and Consumer Representatives in Division



In Victoria, the common roles that community members are called on to play in divisions have been many and varied. Here is a list of those identified in a state-wide audit conducted by GPDV in 2001.

- ✓ Involvement in interviews/focus groups/meetings or surveys about local health needs.
- ✓ Membership of steering groups or reference groups for individual programs conducted by divisions.
- ✓ Membership of program advisory groups or sub-committees which have broader role in overseeing a number of a division's programs.
- ✓ Membership of a division based Consumer or Community Advisory Group that usually has an advisory role to the division's Board of Directors.
- ✓ Involvement in the delivery of division programs through such activities as community education.
- ✓ Providing direct input to program evaluation on the basis of personal experience or knowledge of a program.
- ✓ Contributing to the design of evaluation for specific programs.
- ✓ Collaboration in the design and delivery of professional development activities for General Practitioners.
- ✓ Provision of information, advice and support in the development of funding submissions.
- ✓ Organising joint activities with a division.

In a small number of divisions the Board of Directors have created community positions on their Board. These are filled by people from a variety of backgrounds within the community who bring skills in organisational governance to this role.

A summary report of the audit results can be found at www.gpdv.com.au/consumers

Questions for a Community Representative to ask the Division

The following questions represent an amalgamation of all the issues and factors encompassed by policy and procedure documents developed by divisions in Victoria to guide their interface with consumers and community representatives.

About Division policy

1. What is the division's philosophy / Statement of Principles about consumer / community engagement?
2. Who is responsible for implementation of this policy?
3. How is the policy resourced?
4. Who is included in the division's "community of interest"?
5. What are the division's criteria for evaluating the extent to which division programs incorporate an understanding of consumer and community issues?



Questions relating to Consumer or Community Advisory Groups or Reference Groups are on the following page.

About Consumer / Community Reference Groups

1. What are the specific purposes of the consumer/community reference group?
2. What accountability does the Group have to and within the division?
3. What authority does the Group have?
4. Does a time limit apply to the longevity of the Group or is it ongoing?
5. When will the functioning of the Group be reviewed or evaluated?
6. What is the composition of the Group?
7. What methods of recruitment will be used for membership?
8. What terms of appointment will apply to members in the group?
9. What are the responsibilities of members?
10. What are the responsibilities of the division to the Group members?
11. What are the meeting arrangements for the Group?
12. What time commitment is expected of Group members?
13. What constitutes a quorum for the Group?
14. What reporting arrangements apply for this Group?
15. How will the division resource the Group?
16. What is the relationship between the Group and the Division Board?
17. What confidentiality requirements apply?
18. What decision making power is vested in the Group?
19. What voting rights apply to the Group?
20. What reimbursement is available for Group members?
21. What training is available to the Group?
22. How will the division evaluate consumer representative experiences with the division?

Interesting Websites

Sites incorporating information about health services issues for consumers

National

Healthinsite

Healthinsite has a range of up-to-date and quality assured information on important health topics such as diabetes, cancer, mental health and asthma.

www.healthinsite.gov.au

The Cochrane Library

- Cochrane reviews summarise the research evidence and focus on specific questions. They are intended to support informed decision-making, rather than to replace consultations between practitioners and patients.

www.cochrane.org

Health Insurance Commission

HIC is Australia's primary health information management and payment agency. This site contains information about HIC, including its Charter of Care, information on HIC's services, recent media releases etc.

www.hic.gov.au

Commonwealth Carelink Centres

Anyone may use a Commonwealth Carelink Centre to access information, either by visiting a shopfront personally or by telephoning freecall 1800 052 222. Each centre maintains an extensive database allowing staff to provide up to date, accurate information about local social, health and community services.

www.health.gov.au/acc/cclinkc

Victoria

The Better Health Channel

The Better Health Channel is an internet website that provides useful and accurate health information for consumers. It is part of the Victorian Government's move to provide on-line access to all government services by 2001. Better Health Channel includes a comprehensive searchable Victorian services database.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

*Sites incorporating information about consumer involvement in health***National**The National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation in Health

The main purpose of the centre is to collect information on consumer feedback and participation methodologies and to widely disseminate this information to health care managers and providers, consumers, community based organisations/groups, researchers and policy makers throughout Australia.

www.participateinhealth.org.au

Consumer Health Forum

The Consumer Health Forum mission is to provide a respected and informed national voice for health consumers.

www.chf.org.au

Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHCRIS)

The Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHCRIS) is Australia's portal to a wide range of high-quality information about research, evaluation and development in general practice and primary health care.

www.phcris.org.au

Department of Health and Ageing /National Priorities and Quality /Consumer Engagement

The Priorities and Quality Branch is part of the Health Industry and Investment Division of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The role of the Division is to promote safety and quality improvement, clinical excellence and consumer information and choice in the Australian Health System.

www.health.gov.au/PQ/consumer

VictoriaHealth Issues Centre

Its overall aim is to help create a more equitable health care system which is more responsive to users, particularly those who are disadvantaged by current arrangements.

www.vicnet.net.au/~hissues

Chronic Illness Alliance

The Chronic Illness Alliance members are organisations for people living with a chronic illness.

www.chronicillness.org.au

Department of Human Services / Primary Care Partnerships / Consumer and Carer Advisory Group

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Sites incorporating information about Divisions of General Practice

National

Department of Health and Ageing

The General Practice Branch of DoHA vision is quality general practice at the centre of an integrated primary health care system built on evidence and a consumer focus.

<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/gp/branch/index.htm>

Australian Divisions of General Practice

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd. (ADGP) is the peak national body representing 121 Divisions of General Practice across Australia. The objectives of ADGP are to:

- ensure that there is communication with Divisions of General Practice, directly or through State Based Organisations;
- represent Divisions of General Practice across Australia;
- be the voice of Divisions of General Practice to the Commonwealth of Australia;
- support Divisions of General across Australia;
- advocate for Divisions of General Practice;
- inform the public about issues affecting General Practice;
- promote the exchange of skills, information and ideas between Divisions of General Practice.

www.adgp.com.au

Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHC RIS)

The Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHC RIS) is committed to understanding and supporting the information needs of people interested in consumer issues and consumer participation in general practice and primary health care research, evaluation and development.

www.phcris.org.au/resource/consumers

Australian General Practice Accreditation

Australian General Practice Accreditation (AGPAL) has been established to provide a workable and acceptable system of accreditation for General Practice that focuses on the delivery of quality care. It allows General Practice to maintain its autonomy and accountability by ensuring that accreditation is owned and controlled by the profession for the profession.

www.agpal.com.au

Victorian

General Practice Divisions Victoria

GPDV is the peak body for the 30 divisions of general practice in Victoria. This site links to all Victorian divisions .

www.gpdv.com.au

*Sites incorporating information about Health Promotion***National**The National Asthma Council Australia

The National Asthma Council Australia (NAC) is a non-profit body that serves the community by creating awareness and providing information about asthma.

www.nationalasthma.org.au

Diabetes Australia

A range of information and support services are available including printed literature, group diabetes management courses, audio-visual resources and referral to specialised services.

www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Diabetes Australia Multilingual Internet Resource

The website gives the opportunity to view the Diabetes Australia information in a number of different languages.

www.multilingualdiabetes.org

Australian Diabetes in Pregnancy Society

The Australian Diabetes Society is a professional body established to advance clinical and scientific knowledge and to foster collaboration with other regional societies interested in diabetes in pregnancy. It is also involved in the development of health policy regarding diabetes in pregnancy.

www.adips.org

The Australian Lung Foundation

The Australian Lung Foundation assists the relief of people suffering from lung disease, and promotes better lung health.

www.lungnet.org.au

Mental Health Council Australia

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) is the independent, non-government sector peak body established under the National Mental Health Strategy

(<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe/>) to represent and promote the interests of the mental health sector and advise on mental health in Australia

www.mhca.com.au

Beyondblue

Beyondblue provides a national focus and community leadership to increase the capacity of the broader Australian community to prevent depression and respond effectively to it. The site has a consumer and carers page.

www.beyondblue.org.au

VictoriaDiabetes Australia – Victoria

This organisation's mission is to plan strategy, conduct educational activities, interact with other organisations and people and contribute to diabetes research to achieve valued service and support for people with diabetes, their families and carers.

www.dav.org.au

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

Asthma Victoria is a community funded not-for-profit organisation that provides advice, counselling, education and training for people with asthma and their carers, health professionals, first aiders and the Victorian community as a whole.

www.asthma.org.au

National Heart Foundation

The information provided is for both health professionals and consumers.

www.heartfoundation.com.au

Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council

The Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council Inc. (VMIAAC) is a consumer/survivor advocacy organisation for people with mental health problems. Its membership includes both consumer/survivor groups and individuals who have experienced difficulties with their mental or emotional health.

www.vicnet.net.au/~vmiac/home.htm

*Bodies for health services consumer complaints***Victoria**Health Service Commissioner

The Health Services Commissioner:

- Service is free and confidential
- Helps people make their concerns known to health services providers.
- Protects your right of access to your health information.
- Conciliates formally or informally, between consumers and providers of services.
- Assists in the resolution of complaints.
- Uses information obtained and lessons learned to recommend improvements to services.

www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/

Medical Practitioners Board

The Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria is a statutory authority established to protect the community and guide the medical profession. The Board registers doctors, investigates complaints about doctors, manages the health of doctors who are ill and may be unfit to practise medicine, and develops guidelines for the profession.

<http://medicalboardvic.org.au>

Useful References



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Acronyms

ACRRM	- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
ADGP	- Australian Divisions of General Practice
AGPAL	- Australian General Practitioner Accreditation Limited
AHMAC	- Australian Health Minister's Advisory Council
AMA	- Australian Medical Association
APNA	- Australian Practice Nurses Association
CGPIS	- Centre for General Practice Integration Studies
CHPE	- Centre for Health Program Evaluation
CME	- Continuing Medical Education
DoHA	- Department of Health & Ageing (formerly DH&AC)
DHS	- Victorian Department of Human Services
EPC	Enhanced Primary Care
GPPAC	General Practice Partnerships Advisory Council
GPDV	- General Practice Divisions – Victoria
GPEP	- General Practice Evaluation Program
GPETC	- General Practice Education and Training Council
GPII	- General Practice Immunisation Incentives
GPR	- General Practitioner Register
HIC	- Health Insurance Commission
HACC	Home & Community Care
ITIM	Information Management & Information Technology
MAHS	More Allied Health Services
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MBS	Medicare Benefits Schedule
MoU	- Memorandum of Understanding
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NPMHCI	National Primary Mental Health Care Initiative
PARC	Primary Mental Health Care Australia Resource Centre
PCP	Primary Care Partnerships
PHC RED	Primary Health Care Research Evaluation & Development

PIP	- Practice Incentives Program
PMHC	Primary Mental Health Care
PMHT	Primary Mental Health Care Team
RACGP	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
RANZCP	Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatry
RDNS	Royal District Nursing Service
RDAV	- Rural Doctors Association of Victoria
RWAV	- Rural Workforce Agency Victoria
SBO	State Based Organisation (in Victoria, the GPDV)
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VHA	- Victorian Healthcare Association
VHIA	- Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association