

# A PATIENT'S GUIDE TO SURGICAL FEES

## Five things to know

(AUSTRALIA)

### 1. My doctor has recommended I see a surgeon about having an operation. What are my options?

Your GP will give you a referral to see a surgeon. You have a choice to go to a public or private hospital. The quality of care is the same in both public and private hospitals. The difference is in waiting times, choice of date, choice of surgeon and how much you will pay out-of-pocket.

Public hospitals are free and may have longer waiting times for appointments and surgery. You may see a different surgeon every time you visit. Private hospitals are not free and may have shorter waiting times. You will see the same surgeon every time. Your surgeon and the private hospital should provide you with information about the cost of your appointment and for any surgical procedures.

If you find the cost of surgery in a private hospital is too much for you, talk to your GP or surgeon. They can refer you to a public hospital or to another surgeon for a second opinion.



### 2. I want to be treated as a private patient. How will my surgery be billed by my surgeon?

Before you agree to have surgery as a private patient, you should know all the costs. Your surgeon should provide you with:

- an estimate of the costs for your consultations, procedures and hospital fee,
- if there will be any up-front or out-of-pocket costs, and
- whether they offer flexible repayment plans.

You should receive this information in writing. This is called informed financial consent.

Medicare will help you to pay some of the cost of your surgery. If you have private health insurance, it can help you cover part of the cost of the surgery and the private hospital.

### 3. How much of my surgeon's fee will be covered by Medicare and private health insurance?

Your surgeon should let you know how much will be paid by Medicare and your health fund (if you have private health insurance). Your health fund will tell you what they will pay for and how much they'll pay, and if you must pay an excess when you go to hospital. You should always check with your health fund if your level of cover will pay for your surgery.

Medicare helps Australians with the cost of health care and is paid by the Australian Government. It does not pay for all medical services. The Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) lists the services that will be covered and how much will be paid by the government.

If your surgeon charges more than what Medicare and your health fund will pay for, you will have to pay the difference which is known as the 'gap' or an out-of-pocket cost. These 'gaps' happen because the amount Medicare and the health funds will pay is not enough to cover the rising costs of running a private medical practice.

Your private health insurer may offer to pay for the entire gap (known as the 'no-gap' scheme) or part of the gap ('known-gap' scheme, which is usually capped at \$500 and is paid directly to your surgeon). Not all surgeons choose to participate in these schemes. You may have to pay the entire gap if your surgeon does not participate in a gap scheme.

### 4. What else do I need to know to avoid an unexpected medical bill?

There will be other doctors involved during your surgery, including an anaesthetist and an assistant. They will charge a separate fee. There may be other costs involved with your stay in hospital, such as pathology, scans, pharmacy, prostheses and allied health. Your surgeon will help you get information about these costs. If you have an unexpected complication or extended hospital stay you may have to pay the other doctors who look after you.

### 5. What can I do if I feel my surgeon's fee is unreasonable?

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons does not support excessively high surgery fees. Going to surgery should not put anyone under severe financial hardship. A high surgical fee does not mean that you will have a better surgeon or outcome than if you go to a public hospital.

If the final fees are higher than you expected, contact your surgeon's office to discuss the difference. If you are unable to resolve the problem with your surgeon and still feel the fee is unreasonable, you can contact the RACS Complaints Resolution Department.

**By Email** [complaints@surgeons.org](mailto:complaints@surgeons.org)

**By Phone** 1800 892 491

You may also contact the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman and your local Health Complaints commissioner for assistance with your concerns.

#### Learn more at

[www.surgeons.org/patient-information-resources](http://www.surgeons.org/patient-information-resources)

[www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au)

[www.privatehealth.gov.au](http://www.privatehealth.gov.au)

[www.choice.com.au/money/insurance/health/articles/how-to-avoid-out-of-pocket-health-expenses](http://www.choice.com.au/money/insurance/health/articles/how-to-avoid-out-of-pocket-health-expenses)

[www.ombudsman.gov.au/How-we-can-help/private-health-insurance/private-health-insurance/](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/How-we-can-help/private-health-insurance/private-health-insurance/)

[informed-financial-consent](#)

