

Announcement of changes to our billing policy

Forster Tuncurry Medical Centre is changing its billing policy.

From 1st July 2022, the practice will routinely charge all patients the private fee for a GP consultation. We are no longer able to bulk bill.

Making this change was a very difficult decision for the practice, and we understand some patients may feel surprised and worried about paying private fees for their GP visit.

What do the changes mean?

Your future consultations with GPs at the practice will be privately billed. The changes mean that more patients will pay out-of-pocket costs after their GP visit, than they did in the past.

These changes apply to face to face and telehealth consultations.

Our fees will remain in line with the Australian Medical Association's recommended fee schedule. Pension and health care card holders will pay a reduced rate.

Why are we making these changes?

Keeping the business viable so that we can continue to serve the community and avoid closure, a true risk many practices face, is at the core of this change.

Quality care is no longer sustainable based on bulk-billing.

In the past, our GPs have chosen not to charge everyone the private fee. If you were previously bulk billed, you agreed for Medicare to pay your rebate directly to the practice for a consultation.

Unfortunately, the Medicare rebate does not cover the actual costs of providing care, and with rising expenses (staff wages, equipment, utilities, insurances, rent etc) the difference is now too large for the GP and practice to absorb. Our doctors are left with little choice than charging private fees. Without these, the practice is at risk of closing its doors entirely.

Do all patients pay the full private fee?

Most patients will now pay the private fee for their consultation, with a few exceptions:

- Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) patients
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on pension or health care cards
- Scheduled health assessments and care plans
- Routine vaccinations
- Regular injections

Have other GP practices made these changes?

Yes, the majority of local and national practices are moving away from bulk-billing to only private billing and therefore charge their patients a private fee for consultations.

How can we increase Medicare rebates?

We appreciate that out-of-pocket expenses are not welcome news at this time.

GPs are calling on the Government to reimburse patients a higher amount for GP services. If you would like to help us to campaign for a better funded system, share your views with our local Federal Member of Parliament, Hon Dr Gillespie.

If you are facing severe financial hardship, we encourage you to discuss this with your GP.

Thank you

The Doctors of Forster Tuncurry Medical Centre