



EDUCATION

Bulk Billing and Additional Charges

AUGUST 2022*



Under the **Health Insurance Act 1973** (the Act), if a practitioner bulk bills for a service, the practitioner undertakes to accept the relevant Medicare benefit as full payment for the service.

Additional charges for that service cannot be raised.

This includes but is not limited to:

- any consumables that would be reasonably necessary to perform the service, including bandages and/or dressings;
- record keeping fees;
- a booking fee to be paid before each service, or;
- an annual administration or registration fee.

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1

WHAT IS BULK BILLING?

- Bulk billing (or direct billing) is where a medical practitioner, with the patient's agreement, accepts the patient's Medicare benefit as full payment for a service. When a practitioner bulk bills a patient, the practitioner can receive the Medicare benefit for the service directly from Services Australia, using the online claiming facility.
- Section 20A of the Act provides for bulk billing. For an assignment of benefit in accordance with Section 20A, there must be an agreement under which the patient (or person responsible for the medical expenses such as a parent of a patient) assigns their right to a Medicare benefit to the practitioner who must accept it as 'full payment of the medical expenses incurred in respect of the professional service' provided.
- A patient is required to sign a Medicare assignment of benefit form for a bulk-billed professional service, unless using an online system such as Medicare Easyclaim or any other system that allows the patient to digitally sign an electronic assignment. The patient must be offered a digital or paper copy of the assignment of benefit form to retain.



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CAN THE PRACTICE CHARGE FOR THE SUPPLY OF VACCINES?

- Where the patient is bulk billed, an additional charge can only be raised against the patient by the practitioner where the patient is provided with a vaccine or vaccines from the practitioner's own supply held on the practitioner's premises.
- This exemption only applies to general practitioners and other non-specialist practitioners in association with attendance items 3 to 96 and 5000 to 5267 (inclusive) and only relates to vaccines that are not available to the patient free of charge through Commonwealth or State funding arrangements or available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The additional charge must only be to cover the supply of the vaccine.

Note: Additional fees **cannot** be charged for COVID-19 vaccines, as these are supplied by the Australian Government at no cost to practitioners under the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

3

CAN THE PRACTICE CHARGE ADDITIONAL FEES FOR CONSUMABLES?

- If a medical practitioner bulk bills a patient, they cannot impose additional charges for that service. For example, it is not permitted to charge for consumables such as bandages or dressings.
- The restriction on additional charges applies even if, for example, a separate invoice is used. No matter how the arrangement is described, if the practical effect is that the patient is required to pay additional charges, then the professional service cannot be bulk billed.

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CAN THE PRACTICE CHARGE A MEMBERSHIP FEE TO GUARANTEE BULK BILLED SERVICES TO PATIENTS?

- An annual administration or registration fee is not permitted to guarantee bulk billed services to patients.
- It does not matter how the fee is described (record keeping fees, booking fees, annual administration or registration fees, or co-operative membership fees) or when it is charged (annually, quarterly, before each appointment, or before/after an initial professional service is rendered). If the reality is that the patient is charged an extra fee, then the Medicare benefit for the bulk billed service provided is not payable.

For questions about MBS requirements – email AskMBS@health.gov.au.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BILLING PROCEDURES, SCAN THE QR CODE OR SEARCH MEDICARE BENEFITS SCHEDULE NOTE GN.7.17



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE MEDICARE BILLING AND CLAIMING - BASICS EDUCATION RESOURCE FROM SERVICES AUSTRALIA, SCAN THE QR CODE OR FOLLOW:
WWW.SERVICESAUSTRALIA.GOV.AU > HEALTH AND DISABILITY > HEALTH PROFESSIONALS > MOST USEFUL SERVICES > MBS EDUCATION FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

