

# RACGP Standards for general practices

## Patient feedback – required demographics and themes for collection

### Background

**Criterion QI1.2** of the RACGP *Standards for general practices* (5th edition) (the Standards) requires practices to collect feedback in accordance with the requirements of the **Patient feedback guide**. A questionnaire must collect demographic information and include at least three questions from each of six themes. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide rationale for why each of these themes is important within the patient feedback process.

### Patient demographics

There is good evidence to suggest that a patient's demographics have a large impact on how they experience and judge the quality of their healthcare.

It is important that practices collect core demographic data to differentiate patient experiences and help them interpret patient experience results for quality improvement purposes. For example:

#### Collecting ethnicity

- Collecting information about a patient's cultural heritage will help the practice provide the most appropriate care. The cultural background of a patient can be an important indicator of clinical risk factors and can help practitioners to provide relevant care. Including this demographic questions in patient feedback allows you to see whether particular themes affect patients of some cultural backgrounds more than others.

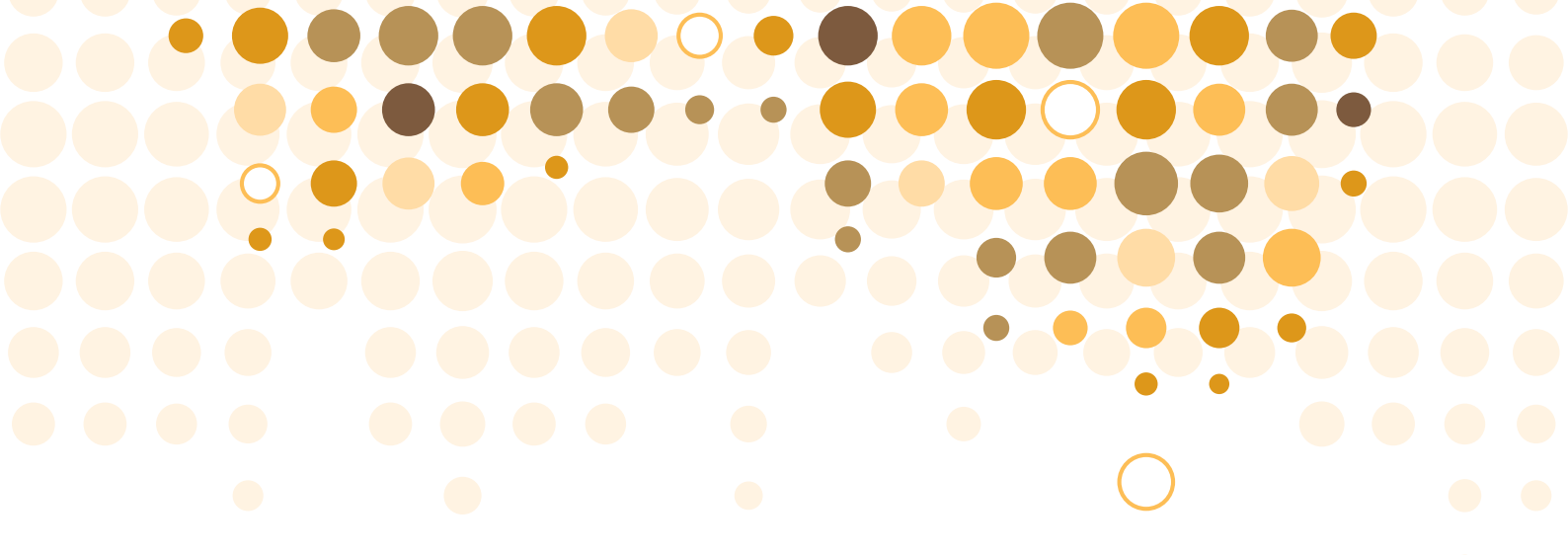
#### Collecting frequency of visits to the practice

- Having a question in your patient feedback survey around frequency of visits to the practice will allow you to filter survey responses to see if there are trends for long-term or newer patients.

The variables for collecting patient demographic data should be a reliable determinant of patient experience, easy to measure (to avoid asking too many questions) and respectful of a patient's sense of dignity and privacy.

As in the RACGP **Patient feedback guide**, every time a practice collects patient feedback – regardless of the method, timing, or tool used – it must collect the demographic data in Table 1 for each participant. These are core demographic variables, but your practice may consider additional variables desirable. You can tailor the sample questions for each of the core demographic variables as required, subject to RACGP approval.

Where practices are using practice specific focus groups or practice specific interviews for collecting patient feedback, the collection of patient demographic data may include the core variables listed in Table 1 but may include more specific demographic data relevant to the particular purpose of the focus groups or interviews (eg seeking feedback from patients with diabetes in a defined age bracket).



Patient demographic	Example of question
Age	Which age bracket are you in?
Gender	What is your gender?
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status	Do you consider yourself to be of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent?
Language(s) spoken at home or country of birth	Which languages do you speak at home?
Education	What is your highest level of education completed?
Health Care Card status	Do you hold some kind of healthcare concession card?
Frequency of visits to the practice	How many years have you been attending the practice? How often do you attend the practice?

Table 1 Required patient demographic questions for patient feedback

- the length of your standard consultations
- the costs of your services and associated billing processes
- your normal opening hours
- arrangements for care outside normal opening hours
- arrangements for home visits.

Patient feedback collected within this theme can help practices to identify barriers to patient access. This informs practices on where to alter things such as opening hours, fees and waiting arrangements to better suit the needs and wants of their patients.

**For example, ask patients:  
How they would rate...**

- *being able to see the clinician of their choice?*
- *getting an appointment for a time that suits them?*
- *the time they have to wait after arriving at the clinic?*

## Patient feedback themes

### Access and availability

Issues of access and availability are of central importance to patients. The access and availability theme is about more than whether patients can physically enter your practice (although physical access is also very important). Some of the access and availability issues you might want to ask your patients about include:

- waiting times to get an appointment
- waiting times when they are in the practice
- the way they make appointments or get advice over the phone from clinical staff members

## Information provision

Issues relating to information provision are important to how patients experience and understand healthcare. Your practice should seek patient feedback on how well informed they feel about: their condition(s), preventative care, health promotion, and other areas of service.

You might also want to ask patients for feedback about your practice information sheet or practice newsletter.

Patient feedback collected within this theme can help clinicians understand the effectiveness of information they pass onto their patients and identify areas where they can provide additional resources to patients.

When filtered against patient demographic data, there may be insights into how patients with a particular education level or from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds respond to information provided to them by clinicians. This kind of insight allows practices to provide information differently, practice-wide or to certain patient cohorts.

### For example, ask patients: How they would rate...

- *the amount of useful information given about their condition(s)?*
- *information about how to take medicines?*
- *information about how to stay healthy?*

## Privacy and confidentiality

Expectations of privacy and confidentiality do differ between patients, however these issues are important to all patients in their experiences of healthcare. When asking patients about privacy and confidentiality, feedback should be sought on:

- physical privacy (eg if the physical aspects of your practice encourage privacy and confidentiality, or if they can maintain privacy when undressing for an examination)
- keeping their personal and health information private (eg if they are confident their health information is not shared with non-clinical staff members, or if they are asked to consent before a third party is present during a consultation).

This patient feedback theme can help your practice to understand how well received or understood your privacy policy is and how comfortable patients feel about how your practice handles their personal information. It may identify improvements related to privacy at your practice, or a need to communicate privacy matters more clearly.

### For example, ask patients: How they would rate...

- *privacy in the waiting area?*
- *privacy when you were examined?*
- *your understanding of how medical records are kept private in the clinic?*

## Continuity of care

Continuity of care is about whether patients have a 'usual GP', their frequency of attending your practice and how long they have been patients of your practice. Continuity is also about how patient care is coordinated within your practice – whether patients see more than one GP, or how GPs and nurses work together to provide care for a patient.

It is also about how your practice coordinates care with other health providers (such as allied health, hospitals or tertiary referrals) to help integrate other types of healthcare into the overall comprehensive care you provide your patients. All of these aspects of continuity of care are important aspects of how patients experience the care provided by your practice.

This patient feedback theme can help your practice understand how well it manages continuous care and how well clinicians are informed about their patients' health status, treatment and history from other health care providers. It may identify opportunities for improvement in patient assurance, referral processes, clinical handover and the provision of information about other health practitioners.

### For example, ask patients: How they would rate...

- *how well the GP knew your medical history?*
- *how well the clinician was aware of advice you had received from other health professionals?*
- *options given to you for specialists or other health providers?*

## Communication and interpersonal skills of clinical staff

One of the fundamental aspects of quality care is good communication between clinical staff and patients. Patients can provide unique feedback on how they experience the communication and interpersonal skills of clinical staff during their consultations.

Patients make judgements about how well they believe healthcare practitioners listen, explain and discuss medical and personal issues with them and whether they feel that they have been involved in decisions about their healthcare.

Important aspects of interpersonal behaviour include:

- demonstrating care, concern and empathy
- showing you remember a patient
- demonstrating knowledge about that patient's medical and personal history
- demonstrating confidence in your diagnosis and treatment.

This patient feedback theme can help clinicians in your practice to adjust their communication style and/or behaviours to better suit patient needs. These questions will highlight areas that may otherwise go unnoticed, given how commonly GP-patient relationships are one-on-one. Collecting and responding to this patient feedback theme shows patients that you value the relationship they have with the practice's clinicians.

### For example, ask patients: How they would rate...

- *respect shown by their GP?*
- *how comfortable their GP made them feel?*
- *how well their GP helped them to understand their medical condition?*
- *how involved they felt they were in decision making processes?*
- *the explanation of the purpose of tests and treatment?*

## Communication and interpersonal skills of administrative staff

While the communication skills of clinical staff are of central importance to patients, the communication skills of non-clinical staff members are also important. For instance, how well your practice's receptionist or practice manager communicates to patients can determine how comfortable or satisfied patients are visiting your practice.

Patients highly value good interpersonal skills. These skills are critical to positive experiences of healthcare experiences.

### For example, ask patients: How they would rate...

- *how well they were welcomed upon your arrival?*
- *the professionalism of reception staff?*
- *how courteous and polite reception staff were?*

## Further information

Further detail regarding patient feedback requirements for accreditation, including options for collecting feedback about patient's experience, is available at: <https://www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/practice-standards/patient-feedback-requirements>

The **application form for approval of a practice specific patient feedback questionnaire** outlines the information your practice must provide if applying to have a questionnaire approved by the RACGP.

Contact [standards@racgp.org.au](mailto:standards@racgp.org.au) or 03 8699 0944 for further information.