

Background

Prevention is the key to Australia's future health, both individually and collectively. It is estimated that 80% of premature heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and 40% of cancer could be prevented through interventions such as healthy diet, regular physical activity and avoiding tobacco products.¹

General practice is at the forefront of healthcare in Australia and is well placed to deliver essential preventive healthcare activities. By providing general practices with an opportunity to evaluate a patient's health and wellbeing, health assessments are crucial to supporting the delivery of quality healthcare.

Health assessments play an important role in population health, both in screening for risk and providing an opportunity for early intervention. The RACGP's **Guidelines for Preventive activities in general practice** (8th edition) (red book) support general practices to undertake health assessments and put preventative activities in place.

Health Assessment Item Numbers

The following table lists the items available in the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) for health assessments:

Service	Item
Brief health assessment of less than 30 minutes duration	701
Standard health assessment lasting more than 30 minutes but less than 45 minutes	703
Long health assessment lasting more than 45 minutes but less than 60 minutes	705
Prolonged health assessment lasting more than 60 minutes	707
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health assessment at consulting rooms or in another place other than a hospital or residential aged care facility	715
Services provided by a practice nurse or registered Aboriginal health worker being the provision of a health assessment for a patient who is receiving or has received their 4 year old immunisation	10986

MBS item numbers 701, 703, 705 and 707 may be used to undertake a health assessment for the following target groups:

Health assessments	Frequency of service to an eligible patient
A Healthy Kids Check for children aged at least 3 years and less than 5 years of age, who have received or who are receiving their 4 year old immunisation	Once only ²
A type 2 diabetes risk evaluation for people aged 40–49 years (inclusive) with a high risk of developing type 2 diabetes as determined by the Australian Type 2 Diabetes Risk Assessment Tool	Once every 3 years
A health assessment for people aged 45–49 years (inclusive) who are at risk of developing chronic disease	Once only
A health assessment for people aged 75 years and older	Annually
A comprehensive medical assessment for permanent residents of residential aged care facilities	Annually
A health assessment for people with an intellectual disability	Annually
A health assessment for refugees and other humanitarian entrants	Once only

The role of practice nurses in health assessments

Practice nurses play an important role in general practice and can assist in improving practice efficiency and patient flow by reducing GP workloads and providing more rapid access to care. Practice nurses often undertake work involved in health assessments, enabling GPs to focus their time and skill on the areas where they are most needed. This supports high quality, efficient and cost-effective primary care.

The extent of the partnership between GPs and practice nurses in delivering health assessments varies from practice to practice. A practice nurse's level of involvement in the health assessment should be decided between the GP and the practice nurse as part of a team-based approach to care, taking into consideration the qualifications, training and skill of the practice nurse. A GP is required to ensure that the care provided by a practice nurse under their supervision is in accordance with accepted medical practice.

A practice nurse's role in providing health assessments often includes but is not limited to:

- documenting current health issues
- updating medical history
- taking measurements
- collating information regarding referrals and the involvement of other health professionals in providing care to the individual
- checking medication use and compliance
- conducting assessments using current and evidence based assessment tools (eg. nutrition, falls risk, mobility and brief mental health assessments)
- providing health education.

This collated information is presented to the GP for review, further assessment and appropriate intervention as required. At times, GPs may direct practice nurses to provide further education to patients about recommended interventions following their review.

Claiming MBS items for health assessments

GPs should use their judgement in determining which MBS health assessment item to claim. The item claimed should reflect the:

- time taken to complete the health assessment (including practice nurse time)
- complexity of the patient's presentation
- comprehensiveness of the examination, in line with the patient's needs and the assessment requirements specified for each target group³
- preventative strategies or activities put in place.⁴

The existing legal requirements governing MBS item numbers 701- 707 and 715 allow a practice nurse to assist a GP with performing health assessments.

However, a practice nurse's contribution to the health assessment should only be one of a number of considerations when determining which MBS health assessment item is appropriate to claim.

All health professionals attending clinical care are accountable for their record keeping. GPs are legally responsible and accountable for their own record keeping and meeting the Medicare criteria for billing purposes. Practices should have systems and protocols in place to ensure that they meet these requirements.

Keeping quality health records

As with all consultations, good record keeping during the health assessment is essential.

Information about the core content of health records, health summaries and consultation notes can be found in Standard 1.7 of the **RACGP Standards for general practices (4th edition)** (the Standards). This standard requires general practices to maintain records with sufficient information to identify the patient and to document reason(s) for a consultation, relevant examination and assessments and the outcomes of the consultation. Criterion 1.7.3 of the Standards requires that consultation notes provide sufficient information about each consultation to allow another member of the general practice team to safely and effectively carry on the management of the patient.

The RACGP's guide **Quality health records in Australian primary healthcare** provides further guidance on the essential attributes of quality health records. General practice teams should ensure the information they record in the health record is complete, consistent, legible, accurate, accessible and timely. Every consultation should be recorded in the correct health record and the health professional(s) should be identified.

In addition to supporting safe and effective patient care, quality health records also provide sound evidence for governance, medico-legal and clinical audit purposes. Quality records also assist in demonstrating compliance with the MBS to Medicare.

Further information

For further billing advice, contact the Department of Human Services via askMBS@health.gov.au or 132 150.

Key resources

MBS Online	www.mbsonline.gov.au
RACGP Standards for general practices (4th ed)	www.racgp.org.au
Quality health records in Australian primary healthcare A RACGP guide to quality health records for practice teams	www.racgp.org.au
RACGP Guidelines for Preventive activities in general practice (the red book) A RACGP guide to provision of preventive care in Australian general practice	www.racgp.org.au
Medicare Benefits Schedule fee summary A RACGP resource that provides members with a quick and easy reference to item numbers and billings costs relevant to general practice	www.racgp.org.au
Health assessments A range of Department of Health resource kits and assessment forms to support general practices to undertake quality health assessments.	www.health.gov.au
APNA provides resources to members, including a summary of MBS items numbers for practice nurses	www.apna.asn.au

Footnotes

- 1 Guidelines for preventative activities in general practice, 8th ed. Melbourne, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2012.
- 2 Cannot be provided if item 10986 has already been claimed.
- 3 Explanatory notes A25-A32 list the specific requirements for health assessments conducted for a specific group. For example, explanatory note A29 lists the requirements for a health assessment conducted for people aged 75 years and older.
- 4 MBS items 701-707 support GPs put a range of preventative activities in place, from providing preventative health care advice and information to developing comprehensive preventative health care management plans.