

Height-adjustable beds

RACGP Standards for general practices (5th edition) fact sheet

What the RACGP Standards say

The RACGP [Standards for general practices](#) (5th edition) (the Standards) requires practices to have at least one height-adjustable bed in their practice (refer to [Criterion GP5.2 – Practice equipment](#)).

Rationale

Research shows that despite the efforts of medical practitioners, policy makers and consumer advocates, people with a disability continue to experience poorer health outcomes in a range of areas compared to the general population.¹

One reason for these poorer health outcomes has been the lack of height-adjustable examination beds in general practices, resulting in fewer opportunities for patients with disability to have thorough and dignified clinical examinations.

Patients who experience difficulties in accessing a height-adjustable bed may lodge a claim of discrimination against their general practice or health service. The flagged (mandatory) Indicator relating to height-adjustable beds in the Standards improves the capacity of health professionals in Australian general practices to effectively examine all patients in a safe and dignified manner. The availability of a height-adjustable bed(s) also ensures that general practices continue to provide high quality care whilst actively addressing their legal obligations.

Using height-adjustable beds may also lessen the risk of workplace injuries because it may reduce the need for practitioners to assist patients onto an examination bed that is too high.

Suggested specifications

Disability advocacy groups have provided the following specifications advice for practices to consider when purchasing a height-adjustable bed. These are not obligatory, but should be considered.

- Preferred minimum range of height adjustment: 45-95 cm
- Preferred maximum weight capacity: 175 kg
- Preferred minimum width of table: 71 cm
- Preferred minimum length: 193 cm
- Number of sections: two (so the head section can be raised)

You could also consider purchasing other features and equipment for your height-adjustable beds, such as stirrups for gynaecological examinations.

Access to the height-adjustable bed

Practices need to consider where to best locate the height-adjustable bed to ensure patients with mobility restrictions can access the bed when required.

Many general practices locate their height adjustable bed in a treatment room rather than a consultation room to avoid general practitioners (GPs) and patients having to wait for access to the bed if it is located in a consultation room.

Practices are responsible for ensuring any safety requirements regarding height-adjustable beds are met. It is advised that practices ensure they are meeting their obligations in regard to legislation, ie. workplace safety requirements.



Practices with multiple locations

General practices with multiple practice locations or branches should consider whether each branch needs its own height-adjustable bed. In general, patients who need access to a height-adjustable bed should be able to access this facility at the branch they normally attend or at an alternate branch located within close proximity.

General practices co-located with other health professionals

General practices co-located with other health professionals who have height-adjustable beds (eg. physiotherapists) should consider whether they need their own height-adjustable bed or whether it may be acceptable to use a height-adjustable bed within the co-located service. In general, patients who need access to a height-adjustable bed should be able to access this facility as required and the GP would need all the equipment necessary to conduct a thorough examination.

What to do if a height adjustable bed is not feasible in your practice

There are few circumstances where a height adjustable-bed would not be feasible in your practice.

The RACGP does not consider cost to be a significant barrier for the following reasons:

- height-adjustable beds are available for under \$2000
- access to height-adjustable beds will reduce the risk of workplace injuries and may protect your practice from complaints of discriminatory treatment.

Practices that do not consider it feasible to provide access to a height-adjustable bed will need to provide:

- a compelling reason why it is not feasible
- an alternative means of care that can be provided to patients with impaired mobility to ensure they receive the same standard of general practice care as a patient without mobility issues.

¹ Physical Disability Council of New South Wales. Report on access to adjustable height examination tables by people with disabilities at general practices. Sydney: Physical Disability Council of New South Wales, 2009.