

# Improving general practice workflows in your practice

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## Introduction

### About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation, representing more than 50,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice.

The RACGP sets and maintains the standards for high-quality general practice care and advocates on behalf of general practitioners (GPs) and general practice in Australia. As a national peak body, our core commitment is to support GPs to address the primary healthcare needs of the Australian population.

#### About this guide

This guide contains information on how to improve workflows in general practices. It also includes guidance on how general practices can incorporate post-discharge appointments and consultations within seven days of hospital admissions. The aim of this guide is to assist GPs and practice owners to improve their workflows and optimise patient care.

## Improving acute care access within general practice

The percentage of Australians waiting for 24 hours or more to see a GP for urgent medical care remained high in 2024 (46%).<sup>1</sup> Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that people living in outer regional, remote and very remote areas are 36.3% more likely to wait longer than they felt acceptable for a GP appointment compared to those living in metropolitan areas.<sup>1</sup> While cost can often be a factor in people delaying medical treatment, long wait times and access can also influence people's decision to not seek medical care when needed.

Improving and prioritising access to acute and urgent care in general practice is key to improving patient outcomes. Supporting patients to see their GPs within seven days after an unplanned hospital admission improves continuity of care and prevents hospital readmissions.<sup>2</sup>

How you implement any of these tips and ideas will depend on what your patient cohort requires and the key areas that could better utilise time management and staff resources.

### Triaging Opportunities

Triage is the preliminary assessment of patients to decide how urgently they require treatment and the type of treatment that is necessary.

A robust triage process in general practice is important to enable the safe and effective management of patient presentations and ensure those with the most urgent need receive timely care.

While triaging can be achieved in various ways within each practice, there are key principles to ensure consistency in the process to protect patients and the practice team. A good triage process ensures that practice staff can recognise life threatening situations, identify symptoms and signs of potentially infectious disease and respond appropriately.

More information on implementing effective triage is available in the RACGP [Standards for general practices](#) (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (the Standards) in [Criterion GP1.1 – Responsive system for patient care](#). Criterion GP 1.1 also contains useful information on telephone triage and managing cross infection through triage.

A triage process and system is a mandatory requirement of the Standards.

## Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

Your reception staff are your frontline. They are the first face/voice your patients see/hear when connecting with your practice. Utilising and investing in the skill set of these team members is invaluable.

Training your reception staff to perform effective triage can greatly assist your practice, and your patients. Equipping your reception staff with a SOP will provide them with a structure to work within your specified guidelines and clinical expectations. This will give reception staff the confidence to support the triage of patients within your practice. You can include common scenarios in your triage SOP with specific steps and actions for each triage category.

Your triage SOP could also include decision tools and flow charts such as the *Prioritisation of patients: a guide to urgency for non-clinical staff* (POPGUNS) triage process that is commonly used in general practice. The POPGUNS process has been adapted by the former Hunter Urban Division of General Practice and converted into a web-based tool called the [General Practice Triage System](#). The tool is a comprehensive guide to support general practices in implementing a safe and effective triage process.

## Available emergency appointments

To ensure patients with urgent needs can receive timely medical care, you must ensure that your practice has availability for urgent or emergency on-the-day appointments. Availability for urgent appointments can relieve some of the pressure from external sources, such as post-discharge from hospitals, which generally are best reviewed promptly within seven days. As primary care can be unpredictable, having these appointments available will also allow your reception and clinical teams to assist and triage patients on a case-by-case basis.

The number and staging of such appointments will be practice specific, as there is no 'one size fits all' solution. If, for example, you are a very busy practice with many practitioners, you might consider having one appointment available per hour. Alternatively, a smaller practice may prefer to have one available appointment in the morning and one in the afternoon. You could also consider doubling up appointments for patients who require a surgical procedure. An example of this could be to administer local anaesthetic on your patient and while waiting for the anaesthetic to be effective, you could see any urgent cases that may have arisen during that time. This way, you can maximise your appointment scheduling and still ensure that patients with urgent needs are able to receive the care they need.

If you have more than one practitioner in your practice, you could share these appointments across your schedules if they are willing to participate in this model of care. Depending on your practice and patient needs, practitioners could alternate between days, mornings, afternoons, or even hour per hour.

Having reserved times for emergency appointments within the day is a requirement within the Standards under [Criterion GP1.1 – Responsive system for patient care](#).

## Networking within your community

Working collaboratively with the medical providers in your practice and the wider local community is important for continuity of care, to prevent care fragmentation and duplication of services. Building and nurturing these relationships can have a great benefit to your business and your patients. Networking within your local medical community can improve patient access and capacity within your community.

Establishing networks will enable you to better coordinate care for your patients and build capacity within your local community. For example, if your practice does not have emergency appointments available on the day, you may be able to direct your patients to another practice or provider within your informal networks. This not only improves coordination and continuity of care for your patients but also ensures that they can have access to urgent medical care when they need it.

## Taking Control of Your Appointments

### Schedule structure

Offering patients' online bookings for your practice will allow you to structure your day and provide efficient time management within your schedule, and those of your teams.

Formulating a schedule can allow you to block out times for urgent appointments and procedures where they best suit the practices and practitioners' day-to-day activities. For example, surgical procedures might be scheduled on two afternoons per week, or a particular day of your choice. This also gives your practice team structure, enabling them to better plan and prepare for any emergencies.

A predictable schedule allows you and your practice team to make appropriate staffing arrangements and optimise resources. In turn, your patients can consider when they might require time off work to have a procedure done, knowing it is usually on a specified day prior to making a booking.

### Maximising your existing software

Knowing what your existing program can do for you is the first place to start. Most software programs can generate reports that you can review. Data from these reports can reveal appointments and billing gaps, staff ratio issues, and a myriad of other essential information that can help you make informed decisions on your practice workflow.

### Cloud-based software

There are a range of cloud-based software systems that can manage appointments and daily structure at a high level.

Cloud-based software systems allow GPs to treat patients outside their usual place of business. This flexibility improves service delivery and allows you and your team to have patient notes and test results during or outside of business hours.

A list of cloud-based software system options are available in the [Useful Links](#) section. Before implementing a new system, ensure you undertake appropriate research to determine what is appropriate for your practice.

### Better use of telehealth

Telehealth appointments can be a cost-effective and convenient alternative to in-person appointments. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a national rise in patients utilising telehealth services. In 2023-24, 89.2% of Australians indicated that they would use telehealth again for consultation, increasing from 87.7% in 2022-23.<sup>1</sup>

Incorporating telehealth appointments into your appointment scheduling can optimise your daily appointments. To ensure that telehealth appointments do not disrupt the efficiency of your practice's day-to-day workflow and are integrated well into patient care, you may wish to ensure that your telehealth platform is well integrated with your scheduling, billing and health records systems. Well integrated systems reduce disruption and ensure streamlined experiences for your practice, practitioners and your patients.

You may also find it beneficial to streamline your telehealth scheduling to ensure that it is integrated that into your practice workflow. For example, you may wish to review your pre-telehealth appointment processes to determine if there are any bottlenecks or inefficiencies. Similarly, reviewing your post-appointment processes can deliver additional benefits on ensuring your telehealth workflows are well integrated in your practice day-to-day. An example of this is determining the best way to manage and send prescriptions and/or referrals following a telehealth consultation.

Another key area to consider in optimising your practice's use of telehealth is to develop a risk management strategy. This may include developing a plan or process for managing patient privacy and technical difficulties during a telehealth consultation, including rescheduling the consultation if technology fails. Your plan or process can also include how GPs will manage patients who become distressed during a telehealth consultation.

Telehealth is also particularly useful for practices in rural and remote areas as they can also leverage the use of telehealth to improve patient access to care. Rural and remote practices with a shortage of resources within their communities, may be able to connect with specialists via telehealth to assist their patients in receiving certain specialised treatments in a timely manner.

Support and education for GPs and practice staff should cover privacy and security of patient information and communication protocols. More information on ensuring patient privacy when providing consultation by telehealth is available in [Criterion GP5.1 – Practice facilities](#) within the Standards.

The RACGP's [Guide to providing telephone and video consultations in general practice](#) provides useful information on best practice telehealth guidelines.

## Workflow changes and your patients

When you make changes within your practice, it is important that you consider how this will impact your patients and the most appropriate way to communicate the changes to your patients. There are various methods when implementing change and needs will vary from practice to practice based on location, demographics and required services.

### Patient input and feedback

Patient feedback and input is an important source of information when it comes to improving and implementing new workflows in your practice. You could consider getting patient feedback prior to making changes, see what your patients have to say, thus ensuring they are brought along the 'change' journey with you.

You could also adapt your patient feedback questionnaire to include questions about certain processes and procedures. This allows you to gather more information to understand how certain processes impact your patients.

Collecting patient feedback is a requirement within the Standards. The RACGP's [Patient feedback guide](#) contains information on how to develop your own methods to collecting and analysing patient feedback.

### Verbal Communication

Verbally communicating changes at the practice to your patients during their appointments can also make a difference to affect positive change. This allows patients to ask questions or provide on-the-spot feedback that you may otherwise not be aware of.

### Marketing Collateral

Marketing collateral is a collection of media, digital or printed, used to support, communicate, or promote a business' brand message, products, or services.

Posters in your waiting room and reception areas can be useful to not only inform patients and consumer about changes in your practice but also to promote the services you offer and display public health messaging made available by government or non-government organisations.

Pamphlets for patients about your practice services and team will assist them in understanding why and how the change will come about and when it will take effect from.

You can also consider using social media in engaging new and prospective patients to bring them into your practice, but also to current patients that already use or are familiar with your business to keep them informed of what is happening in your practice.

## Useful Links

### RACGP resources

[RACGP General Practice Policy and Procedure Templates](#)  
[RACGP General Practice Management Toolkit](#)  
[RACGP General Practice Business Toolkit](#)  
[RACGP Standards for general practices \(5<sup>th</sup> edition\)](#)  
[RACGP Standards for general practices resource guide](#)  
[Patient Brochure Template – Telehealth](#)  
[The use of telehealth in general practice – Position statement](#)  
[RACGP Patient feedback guide](#)  
[Patient Feedback Participation Template](#)  
[Patient Feedback Survey Template](#)  
[Generic Practice Policy Template](#)  
[Social media in General Practice](#)

### Other resources

[Australian Medical Association's Guide to social media and medical professionalism](#)  
[Medical Board of Australia's Telehealth consultation with patients](#)  
[Practice Coaching - Free e-learning for General Practice](#)  
[General practice training and consulting – receptionist triage training](#)  
[Wesley Institute of Training – Medical triage for non-clinical staff](#)

## References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2023-24. Patient experiences. Available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-services/patient-experiences/latest-release#waiting-times> [Accessed 12 June 2025].
2. Liotta, M. 2022. Integration between hospital and general practices 'critical'. newsGP, 6 December 2022. Available at <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/integration-between-hospitals-and-general-practice> [Accessed 11 March 2024].