Obtaining Medicare cards for children in out-of-home care

The following advice aims to ensure that all eligible children and young people in out of home care are able to access health services funded by Medicare Australia.

The Commonwealth government funds many health services where access and reimbursement of costs requires presentation of a valid Medicare Card (or a valid Medicare number).

It is therefore important that when a child is placed in out of home care their parent or guardian provide the child’s Medicare card or Medicare number.

Interim Accommodation Orders and short term voluntary placements

A child placed on a voluntary basis, or on an Interim Accommodation Order whose parents or guardians have provided a Medicare number may continue to access medical services with that number.

It is not necessary to provide a person’s Medicare card number to access medical treatment or claim reimbursement for a Medicare service. If parents are not able or willing to provide a Medicare number, a carer who is required to pay for a service can be paid a Medicare benefit in a Medicare office even if the child is not enrolled on their Medicare card by advising the officer that they paid for the service (as long as the child is enrolled in the Medicare Program1 – see later for advice if the child has not been enrolled). If a child is taken to a doctor who bulk bills (bills Medicare directly and does not charge the carer) the doctor can obtain the child’s card number directly from Medicare Australia for billing purposes by calling Medicare Australia’s 24 hour enquiry number 13 21 50 and providing the child’s full name and date of birth.

The Medicare number thus obtained may continue to be used by the GP to bulk bill while the child is in out-of-home care.

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1 Medicare Victoria advises that it is rare for an eligible child not to be enrolled in Medicare. Parents usually complete a claim form for the ‘baby bonus’ in hospital shortly after birth, which is automatically forwarded by Centrelink to Medicare for enrolment. The child does not need to have had their birth registered at Births, Deaths and Marriages to be enrolled in Medicare.
Medicare Australia may disclose the Medicare number of a child under the age of 14 years to a Child Protection Contact Officer over the phone (through the Information sharing Protocol between Child Protection Agencies and Commonwealth) where the child is in the care or custody of the Secretary. This process is only appropriate when a child or young person is in a situation that places their life, health or welfare at risk. Such situations should not normally arise for a child in out-of-home care, especially when a Medicare number is not essential for accessing medical care as outlined above.

If the child is found not to have been enrolled in Medicare, the medical bill will have to be paid and the child enrolled on their own card (see BOX B below Applying for a Medicare card in the name of a child not previously enrolled in Medicare). The Medicare benefit can be claimed once a Medicare card number is allocated for the child.

**Long Term/Ongoing Placements**

If the placement is ongoing, parents may give their consent to the child being copied to the existing card of a carer\(^2\). If the child is aged 15 years or over they can apply to transfer to a new card of their own or to be copied to the card of their carer. Both these processes require completion of an ‘Application to copy or transfer from one Medicare card to another’, which can be obtained from a Medicare office or downloaded from:


If the child is on an order of greater than 6 months duration, DHS or the CSO providing the placement can apply for a card in the child’s name, with DHS / CSO or the child’s name being designated as the ‘contact person’ or ‘cardholder’. (See BOX A below Applying for a Medicare card in the name of a child already enrolled in Medicare).

**Children not eligible for Medicare**

DHS is responsible for payment of all medical expenses for children not eligible for Medicare.

**Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)**

If a child requires a PBS medicine, it is a legislative requirement that the child’s Medicare card number is provided to the pharmacist to determine the child’s eligibility to the PBS. However, where it is not possible for the child, parent or carer to provide Medicare card details, a pharmacist can use a pharmacy only ‘Special Medicare Number’. With consent of the child, parent or carer, the pharmacist can also phone the Medicare Australia PBS enquiry line to obtain the child’s Medicare card number.

\(^2\) This requires the written consent of both parents or guardians if the child is attached to their Medicare cards.
BOX A

Applying for a Medicare card in the name of a child already enrolled in Medicare

An application by Child protection or a CSO for a Medicare card in the name of a child or young person requires the following documentation:

1) A letter on DHS or CSO letterhead, requesting a Medicare card for the child in care. The letter must include:
   a) Personal details of mother or father - full name/s, date of birth, address and Medicare number (if known)
   b) Child’s details – full name/s, date of birth, and place of birth
   c) Name of approved Agency/carer looking after the child

2) A certified copy of the current court order placing the child in DHS care.

3) A completed Medicare enrolment application form that can be downloaded from:
   a) DHS / CSO or the child’s name as ‘cardholder’ or ‘contact person’ in Section 1;
   b) the child / young person’s details (including the current Medicare number, if known) in Section 2, (a separate form and card is required for each sibling unless they are named on the same Court Order);
   c) the ‘cardholder’ or ‘contact person’s’ signature (usually the DHS worker/CSO worker or the carer for the child.

The documentation can be submitted either:

In person: At any Medicare office
Please refer to www.medicareaustralia.gov.au for Medicare office locations and forms

By post to: Eligibility Team
Dept of Human Services - Medicare
12th Floor
GPO Box 9822
MELBOURNE 3001

In person application
If a worker applies in person at a Medicare office, and provides all required documentation, the child will be enrolled immediately and a number will be given to the worker attending the office. The worker will need to provide photo identification. The Medicare card in the child’s name will be sent directly to the DHS / Agency Address of the cardholder within 21 days.

Postal application
If the application is posted directly to the Eligibility Team in Melbourne with all required documents, applications will be actioned on the day received. If requested, once the enrolment is actioned, the Eligibility Team can contact the cardholder/contact person using the phone number listed in the accompanying letter, preferably a direct line, and provide the Medicare number. Alternatively, workers may contact the Eligibility team on 1300 660 035 to receive the child’s Medicare number. The Medicare card will be sent directly to DHS / Agency address of the cardholder within 21 days.

The cardholder / contact person must advise Medicare Australia of a change of placement or court order and provide copies of any new court order.
BOX B

Applying for a Medicare card in the name of a child not previously enrolled in Medicare

Proof of eligibility must be provided in addition to the above documentation required when applying for a card for a child not enrolled in Medicare.

To be eligible for Medicare a child must:

a) hold Australian citizenship
b) have been issued with a permanent visa
c) hold New Zealand citizenship
d) have applied for a permanent visa

documents confirming eligibility are:
a) Birth certificate or certified extract
b) Completed FA004P form Newborn/Child claim for Family assistance
c) Passport or naturalisation certificate
d) Adoption papers (where migration status is known)
e) Documentation from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) verifying that an application for an Australian State or Territory Welfare Authority Supported Child (visa subclass 802), ‘vulnerable child’ visa has been submitted. The child must also have a visa confirming their right to reside in Australia. If the child does not have a valid visa, an appropriate Bridging visa will automatically be issued by DIAC on receipt of a valid application for visa subclass 802 using Form 47CH – Application for migration to Australia by a child at: http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/application-forms/index.htm. There is a Helpline on 131881.
f) Centrelink records which verify the child’s birth

Applications may be submitted to Medicare by post or in person as detailed above for children already enrolled.

The cardholder / contact person must advise Medicare Australia of a change of placement or court order and provide copies of any new court order.

Please also refer to the Medicare Australia publication Medicare claiming—Grandparents and Carers at: