

Criterion GP1.3 – Care outside of normal opening hours

Indicators

GP1.3►A Our patients are informed about how they can access after-hours care.

GP1.3►B Our patients can access after-hours care.

Why this is important

As patients sometimes require medical care outside of normal opening hours, they value an ongoing relationship with a practice or GP who provides medical care on a 24-hour basis. Research indicates that patients who have better access to their practice in after-hours periods have significantly fewer emergency department visits.²

If your practice is not able to provide after-hours care, you need to have arrangements in place so other services can manage your patients' needs after-hours.

Meeting this Criterion

Informing patients about care outside of normal opening hours

Your practice must inform patients of your normal opening hours and the arrangements for care outside of normal opening hours. To do this, use one or more of the following:

- An out-of-hours message on your practice's telephone
- Relevant information on your website and in your practice's collateral, including leaflets, newsletters and an information pack for new patients
- A clearly visible sign outside of the practice that indicates your normal opening hours and the arrangements for care outside of those hours

After-hours periods

Medicare defines the after-hours periods as follows:

Day	Normal hours	Sociable after-hours	Unsociable after-hours
Weekdays	8.00 am – 6.00 pm	6.00–11.00 pm	11.00 pm – 8.00 am
Saturdays	8.00 am – 12.00 pm	None	Before 8.00 am; after 12.00 pm
Sundays and public holidays	None	None	All day

After-hours care

In order for your patients to be able to access care after-hours, your practice could deliver after-hours care directly, either during sociable after-hours or for the full after-hours period.

If your practice cannot provide after-hours care to its patients directly, you could participate in a cooperative arrangement with another practice to deliver after-hours care during sociable or unsociable hours.

After-hours care may also be performed on behalf of your practice; however, there must be a direct and continuing relationship between your practice's GPs and the clinicians who perform the after-hours care on their behalf.

This could be done by having:

- formal arrangements in place with other providers, such as a medical deputising service, to deliver after-hours care
- an agreement with local healthcare providers that operate outside of your normal opening hours.

If your practice uses other services to provide care, you must agree on and document:

- details of the arrangements
- how and when you receive documentation and information about care provided to your patients outside of normal opening hours
- how the providers of after-hours care can contact the practice in an emergency or under exceptional circumstances.

Regardless of how your practice ensures patients can access care outside of normal opening hours, your patient health records must contain reports or notes of after-hours care that is provided by, or on behalf of, your practice.

If you have arrangements with any external providers, give them after-hours contact details of one or more GPs from your practice so that, if required, they can access important information about the patient, particularly in an emergency.

Meeting each Indicator

GP1.3▶A Our patients are informed about how they can access after-hours care.

You must:

- educate the practice team members so they can explain how patients can access after-hours care.

You could:

- have signs in the waiting area, at the practice's entrance and on your website explaining how patients can access after-hours care
- maintain an after-hours voicemail message that clearly states how to access after-hours care
- obtain contact details for any other health services for which your practice provides after-hours care, in case the service needs to be contacted in an emergency that involves one of their patients.

GP1.3►B Our patients can access after-hours care.

You must:

- include details of after-hours care the patient has received in the patient's health record (eg entries made by the practice team, treatment reports from the health service that provided the care).

You could:

- maintain a roster showing which practice team members are on-call for after-hours
- participate in a cooperative arrangement with another practice to deliver after-hours care
- have formal arrangements in place with other providers, such as a medical deputising service, to deliver after-hours care
- have an agreement with local healthcare providers that operate outside of your normal opening hours
- have an after-hours phone message that tells patients where they can access after-hours care.