

After Hours Care Arrangements Policy

1. Policy Title

After Hours Care Arrangements Policy

2. Purpose

This policy describes the arrangements [Practice Name] has in place to support patients who need medical care outside standard opening hours. It aligns with criterion PP10 – Care when the practice is not open of the RACGP Standards for general practices (6th edition).

3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff and covers the communication of after-hours arrangements, the providers used, and the clinical follow-up of patients who use after-hours services.

4. Definitions

- Standard hours: The practice's published opening hours.
- After hours: The periods before and after standard hours, weekends, and public holidays.
- After-hours care provider: An accredited service or individual providing care on behalf of, or in support of, the practice (e.g., a deputising service, primary care clinic, healthdirect, or 000).

5. Principles

- Patients can access safe, appropriate care at all times.
- After-hours arrangements are clearly communicated to patients.
- Continuity of care is maintained through prompt follow-up of after-hours contacts.
- After-hours care is delivered by suitably qualified clinicians with appropriate clinical information.

6. Arrangements

- The practice uses an accredited after-hours medical deputising service to provide home visits and clinic-based care during after-hours periods (named provider: [After-Hours Provider]).
- For emergencies, patients are advised to call 000.
- For non-emergency advice, patients are directed to healthdirect (1800 022 222) where available.
- Where the practice does not provide its own after-hours service, the chosen arrangement and rationale are documented and reviewed at least annually.

7. Communication to Patients

- After-hours arrangements are clearly communicated via the practice's telephone message, website, voicemail, and signage.
- Patients are advised of their options for emergencies (000), advice (healthdirect), and routine after-hours medical care.

8. Clinical Information and Follow-up

- The after-hours provider is given access to relevant clinical information (with appropriate patient consent and via a secure channel) for the patients they see.
- Reports from after-hours attendances are received, reviewed, and filed in the patient's electronic health record by the next business day.
- Significant findings or actions are escalated to the patient's usual GP for follow-up.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Practice Manager:

- Maintains the contract/arrangement with the after-hours provider.
- Ensures patient communications and signage are accurate.

GPs:

- Review and act on after-hours reports for their patients.

Reception staff:

- Communicate after-hours arrangements to patients.

10. Monitoring, Audit, and Review

- Quarterly review of the volume and timeliness of after-hours reports received and filed.
- Annual review of the after-hours arrangement and this policy.

11. Documentation and Record Keeping

The practice maintains:

- Documentation of the after-hours arrangement and any service agreements.
- Records of after-hours attendances and follow-up actions in each patient's record.
- Records of patient complaints relating to after-hours care.

12. References

- The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Standards for general practices (6th edition). East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP; published 26 August 2026. Available at: <https://www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/practice-standards/standards-6th-edition>
 - healthdirect Australia. Available at: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au>
 - Department of Health and Aged Care. After-hours primary care. Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au>
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Version Control

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