

Choosing a Healthcare Professional

Care Matters

Learning & Wellbeing

Choosing a healthcare provider, either for yourself or someone you care for, is a decision that may arise at various times throughout life. Whether you need to enrol with a general practitioner (GP) as your first point of contact for healthcare and advice, require support from a specialist doctor such as a paediatrician, or need to see an allied health professional such as a psychologist, it is important to feel both comfortable and confident in the care you receive.

Several factors may be helpful to consider when choosing who will provide your healthcare. These include their qualifications and area of expertise, ability to meet your unique needs, availability to see new clients, understanding of disability/neurodivergence, location and other accessibility issues, and fees.

Start here:

Find some healthcare provider options

Some ideas to help get you started when looking for a healthcare professional include:

- > **Ask people you know or trust if they have any recommendations.** For example, you could ask:
 - Friends, family members or colleagues.
 - Other trusted professionals you have contact with, such as educational professionals.
 - People you may have contact with in social/support groups, either online or in person. For example, Facebook groups, Disability Connect's Zoom Parent Support Group or Parent to Parent's local support groups.
- > **Search for the names and contact details of professionals in trusted sources,** such as local newspapers/community news sources, reputable websites or online directories/registers using a keyword search (i.e., searching based on the type of professional you are looking for and the region you live in). Some examples:
 - <https://healthpages.co.nz/> – a comprehensive online reference source of health and wellbeing services in New Zealand
 - <https://autismnz.org.nz/community-links/> – an informative webpage on Autism NZ's website, which provides community links and details that may be helpful for Autistic people
 - <https://www.psychology.org.nz/public/find-psychologist> – a search tool that may be useful for those looking for support from a psychologist
- > **Ask your GP or other primary care provider for information or to make a referral.** If you require access to additional/specialist healthcare and support, your GP may be able to:
 - Make a referral for you, if appropriate, to other professionals/departments in the public healthcare system (provided you are eligible for publicly-funded healthcare). If there is a particular professional that you would like to be referred to, let your GP know, as they may be able to indicate your preference in the referral. You can find out who is eligible for publicly-funded health services (i.e. funded by the government and provided free or at a subsidised cost) here: <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/corporate-information/our-health-system/eligibility-for-publicly-funded-health-services>
 - Provide you with information about health professionals who work in the private sector (i.e. where you engage the health provider privately and pay for the support yourself), if this is an option you wish to consider.

The next step:

Consider your options and think about the factors that are important to you

Depending on your **unique circumstances and needs**, you might want to think about some or all of the following points. If, for example, you are seeing an allied health professional, such as a physiotherapist, for a one-off, non-urgent appointment, some of these factors might not be relevant to your decision. However, if you are choosing a GP you expect to see regularly over time, factors such as communication style and availability might be crucial.

If you have any questions, you can contact the professional you are interested in to ask them directly. Alternatively, you can check if there is any information available online (for example, check the professional's website, if they have one), ask for feedback from other people you may know who have used the provider's services, or simply think about the factors that are important to you and keep them in mind when attending your first appointment.



Qualifications and area of expertise. Is the professional suitably qualified and experienced in the areas that you need?



Costs. Are you seeing the professional through the public or private healthcare system? What is the cost (if any) of each appointment? How many appointments do you expect to attend? (Be aware that you may gain a clearer picture of



We needed a psychologist who understood how differently autism presented in girls and somebody who was able to build a rapport quickly with an anxious 10-year-old. Finding out about specialists' knowledge and experience was important to us as we didn't want to waste time and money with somebody who didn't understand our situation."

your treatment plan once you have discussed your circumstances and needs at the first appointment.) Are there any additional costs to consider, such as medication or X-rays? Is payment required on the day, or is there the possibility of a payment plan? If you have healthcare insurance, check the terms of your policy carefully to see what costs it might cover. Even with publicly funded healthcare, it is a good idea to ask about expected costs—for example, the cost of a GP visit may differ between practices.

In certain circumstances, support may be available to help you pay some of your health-related expenses. For example, Work and Income New Zealand may be able to offer support <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/index.html> or, in the case of medical-related expenses for children, applying for an individual grant through Variety may be an option to consider. Learn more here: <https://www.variety.org.nz/get-support/apply-for-ig>.

> **Availability to see patients.** Is the professional accepting new clients? How long should you expect to wait to get an appointment? If the professional is not currently accepting new clients, feel free to ask when they expect to do so again. There may be waitlists to see health professionals in both the public and private healthcare systems.

> **Location and other accessibility issues.** Are the health provider's consulting/treatment rooms convenient for you to access? Is parking available, or if you use public transport, is it close to public transport routes? Is the environment clean, tidy and accessible for you? If it is difficult for you to attend appointments during standard working hours, consider whether telehealth* or after-hours/weekend appointments are an option.

> **Understanding of disability and neurodivergence.** What is the professional's understanding of, and approach to, disability? For example, do they embrace an affirming view of disability and accommodate your unique needs (for example, sensory needs)? Is any support/therapy they provide or recommend backed by the latest evidence-based research, including research drawn from the lived experience of disabled people?

If you are Autistic or are looking for a professional for your Autistic child, consider whether the support aligns with the Aotearoa New Zealand Autism Guideline: He Waka Huia Takiwatanga Rau Third edition (in particular, Good Practice Point 4.3.13). You can access a copy of the Guideline here: <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/about-us/programmes-strategies-and-studies/guidelines/nz-autism-guideline>. This article also has some useful tips to think about: <https://www.altogetherautism.org.nz/finding-a-neuro-affirming-therapist/>

> **Communication.** If you have unique communication preferences/needs, ensure these will be respected and accommodated. Also, consider your first impressions or experiences with the professional—did you feel like your concerns were acknowledged

*Please note: If you are seeking a professional to undertake an autism assessment, we understand that an autism diagnosis confirmed solely by a telehealth/online assessment process is not considered a valid diagnosis for accessing funded Disability Support Services. Please keep this in mind when considering your options.

and addressed? Did the professional communicate with you in a respectful and affirming way? If you have completed a 'Health Passport' for your health provider, has the provider read and respected the information? You can see some examples of Health Passports here: <https://www.hdc.org.nz/disability/my-health-passport/>

If you would like to learn more about New Zealand's healthcare system, the Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora website has some helpful information: <https://info.health.nz/services-support>

This information about GPs (what they do, how to choose one, etc.) may be particularly helpful: <https://info.health.nz/services-support/general-practices>

Under the **Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights** (the Code), you are entitled to **express a preference** for who will provide your healthcare services, and "have that preference met where practicable." You can read more about the rights granted under the Code (for example, the right to be treated with respect and the right to effective communication) here: <https://www.hdc.org.nz/your-rights/about-the-code/code-of-health-and-disability-services-consumers-rights/>

Some final tips!

Once you have chosen your healthcare professional

- > Before each appointment with your healthcare provider, think about your needs and any concerns or queries, and **spend some time preparing**. Jot down some notes and take these with you to the appointment to help you remember everything you need to say (this template might be helpful: <https://healthify.nz/assets/Brochures/lets-plan-for-better-care.pdf>). This can help you make the most of your appointment, as you will be better prepared to articulate your concerns and queries and advocate for yourself. You can read some more tips about preparing for a healthcare appointment here: <https://healthify.nz/hauora-wellbeing/d/doctors-visits>
- > If you wish to discuss multiple or complex health issues or think, for any other reason, one appointment may not be long enough to discuss all your concerns, it's a good idea to raise this when booking. For some appointments, you might wish to **request a double appointment** (e.g. GP appointments, which are typically 15 minutes long in NZ). Your healthcare provider will advise as to whether they can accommodate your request. (Double appointments usually cost more, due to the extra time and resources required.)
- > If you need any extra support, you can (in most cases) **bring a support person to your appointment** with you—this could be a friend, family member, or trusted advocate. Your support person can offer support in several ways, such as taking notes of what is discussed during the appointment, assisting you in communicating your concerns and queries with your healthcare professional, or simply sitting with you as moral support.

“ I attend all appointments well prepared. I make notes, think things through before I go in, and refer to my notes during the appointment. I'll follow up if need be too, either by leaving a phone message with the receptionist to pass on to the Doctor, or by emailing the Doctor directly. We can't afford to go privately for additional support, so I've had to learn to be assertive and advocate for my son's needs.”

- > If you are **unhappy with the service you have received**, you may wish to consider making a complaint. Depending on the nature of your concern, there are several ways to do this, but raising your concerns with the healthcare provider involved is usually a good starting point. You can read more here: <https://info.health.nz/services-support/rights-privacy/complaints-about-a-health-and-disability-service>
- > If you need any support in this area, you may want to contact the **Nationwide Health and Disability Advocacy Service**. This is a free, independent service that provides support and advice around your healthcare rights and can help you to resolve any issues you may have. You can learn more here: <https://advocacy.org.nz/>
- > You can **change your mind** about receiving healthcare support and advice from a professional at any time and choose/express your preference to see a different provider. However, there may be practical implications to consider when doing so, such as whether the new professional has the availability to see new patients.

Disclaimer:

The information in this document is for general information purposes only. It is not intended as a thorough and complete guide to an individual's specific situation. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this document, which is reviewed regularly. If you have any questions, please contact: SupportInformation@parent2parent.org.nz

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