

Understanding my ophthalmologist's fee

When you are referred to an ophthalmologist (or any other medical specialist) it is because you require treatment from a doctor who is an expert in a specific area of medicine.



Ophthalmologist

An ophthalmologist is a medical specialist trained in diagnosis, treatment, and surgery for disorders of the eye and visual system.

In Australia an ophthalmologist is a doctor who has:



- completed a medical degree (6-7 years)
- completed an internship, residency, and senior residency (3+ years)
- trained as an ophthalmology registrar (5 years) and may have done further fellowship training

All ophthalmologists practising in Australia must be registered with the Medical Board through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Ophthalmologists are required to undertake continuing medical education throughout their career.

An ophthalmologist's costs

Medical fees may vary from doctor to doctor. In setting a fee doctors have to take into account the particular costs they incur delivering their services to patients.

Here are some of the costs ophthalmologists face in delivering their specialised services to patients that you might not be aware of:



High-tech equipment

Ophthalmologists use expensive specialised ophthalmic equipment including lasers, OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) machines to image the back of the eye, refractors and keratometers in detecting and treating disorders and diseases of the eye.



Highly trained support staff

An ophthalmologist must be supported by staff who have been specifically trained to assist with patient assessment and treatment, can answer all questions patients have, and will ensure the highest attention to detail when it comes to patient safety and the privacy of patient information.



Facilities and software

An ophthalmologists must ensure that his or her practice is equipped with high-tech patient software systems, hygienic procedural rooms and modern waiting areas to ensure patient safety, privacy of information and patient comfort.



Insurance

Ophthalmologists must take out comprehensive insurances across all areas of their practice — in particular medical indemnity insurance, which protects both doctor and patient in the event of a complication.

Medicare rebates and private health insurance cover

Part of your ophthalmologist's fee is likely to be covered by Medicare (the government's rebate for patients). Private health funds are only permitted to fund services in a hospital or day surgery, not in a doctor's rooms.

Unfortunately, successive Federal Governments have failed to ensure that Medicare rebates keep pace with things like inflation and the rising costs of medical care. This means the Medicare rebate

made available to patients is often well below what the service costs.

What is left over after the Medicare rebate (and private health insurance where applicable) is the remaining cost to the ophthalmologist for providing the care you receive.



Informed financial consent



Learning how much your treatment will cost is called Informed Financial Consent.

Ophthalmologists strive to ensure patients are given a clear indication of how much they will be charged for each episode of treatment provided prior to it taking place.

This is usually provided as a printed document that you will be asked to sign.

If for some reason your doctor does not outline your fee, be sure to ask them to.

In hospital treatment

When undergoing hospital treatment, you will likely receive separate bills from the different specialists involved in your treatment (for example one bill from the ophthalmologist and one from the anaesthetist treating you). Make sure you speak to all specialists involved in your treatment and obtain separate Informed Financial Consent from each one.



TIP Don't be afraid to ask questions

Your ophthalmologist wants you to feel comfortable and informed about your treatment and the costs that will be involved. If you aren't sure about something, don't hesitate to ask.



This information has been provided by the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists for members of the Society and healthcare consumers. We endeavour to make sure the information is accurate and up to date, however we can't guarantee that it will always apply to you. Be aware that if you have any specific questions about any medical matter, you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider.