Adult ADHD Referrals: What to Ask Your GP



Adult ADHD referrals are often the first practical step for someone who has spent years trying to make sense of difficulties with attention, organisation, time, emotional regulation or follow-through. The referral process can feel unclear because assessment, psychological support, Medicare requirements and medical decisions may involve different professionals. Knowing each person's role can make the next step more manageable.

A referral is not a diagnosis and does not need to prove that ADHD is present. It is a clinical handover that explains why an assessment is being sought, records relevant history, and helps the receiving clinician understand the person's current circumstances. For some adults, a referral also forms part of the paperwork needed to seek a Medicare rebate, if current eligibility requirements are met.

Who can make an adult ADHD referral?

Adults can contact a psychologist directly for an assessment appointment. This is called self-referral. A referral may also come from a GP, psychiatrist, paediatrician where appropriate, or another allied health professional involved in the person's care.

For many adults, the GP is a useful starting point. GPs can review physical health, current medications, sleep, mental health concerns and other factors that may contribute to concentration or executive-function difficulties. They can also discuss whether a Mental Health Care Plan and referral are appropriate for psychological services.

A psychiatrist has a separate medical role. Psychologists undertake assessment, diagnostic support and psychological therapy within their scope of practice. Psychiatrists and GPs make medical decisions, including whether medication may be considered. A person may see one or both at different points in the pathway, depending on their needs and the purpose of the appointment.

What a GP referral can include

A concise referral is usually enough. It does not need to contain a detailed life history, but it can give useful context for the assessment process. The GP may include the reason for referral, current concerns, relevant medical and mental health history, and any previous assessments or supports.

It can also help to note factors that may need consideration alongside ADHD. Difficulties with sleep, anxiety, depression, trauma, substance use, chronic pain, concussion, thyroid conditions and some other health issues can affect concentration, energy, memory and daily functioning. This does not mean one explanation rules out another. It means the assessment needs to consider the broader clinical picture rather than rely on a checklist alone.

Past school reports, prior psychology or psychiatry letters, and records of learning support can be helpful where available. Adults do not need to delay an appointment while trying to locate every document. Developmental information is gathered over time, and records are considered as one source of information rather than as a pass-or-fail requirement.

What adult ADHD referrals do and do not do

A referral opens the door to an assessment or support service. It does not confirm a diagnosis, guarantee a particular outcome, or replace the assessment itself. It also does not automatically establish eligibility for Medicare rebates.

Medicare arrangements depend on the type of referral, the service provided and current Medicare requirements. A Mental Health Care Plan may support access to rebates for eligible psychological services, but the details should be checked with the GP and clinic before the first appointment. Fees, rebates and the number of eligible sessions can vary according to the individual arrangement.

A referral for psychological assessment may be useful even when a person is also waiting to see a psychiatrist. Psychological assessment can document developmental history, current functioning and patterns of difficulty across settings. The resulting information may assist communication with the GP or psychiatrist, although each practitioner makes their own clinical decisions.

What happens after the referral

The clinic will usually review the referral and ask for practical details before booking. This may include contact information, the reason for seeking assessment, previous reports and the preferred appointment format. Behavioural Neurotherapy Clinic provides appointments in Doncaster for people across metropolitan Melbourne, with Australia-wide telehealth appointments available where suitable.

An adult ADHD assessment commonly involves more than one appointment. The psychologist takes a developmental history, explores current functional difficulties, and asks about school, work, relationships, home responsibilities and previous mental health support. Structured questionnaires or rating scales may be used. With consent, information from a parent, partner or another person who knew the adult during childhood can sometimes add useful developmental context.

The psychologist also considers whether another neurodevelopmental, mental health, learning, sleep or medical issue may be relevant. This part matters because similar daily difficulties can arise for different reasons, and more than one condition may be present. Assessment is a process of gathering and weighing information, not simply matching a person to a list of traits.

At the feedback appointment, the psychologist discusses the findings and the limits of those findings. The discussion may include whether the information supports ADHD, whether further assessment is needed, and what supports could be considered. Where a diagnosis is made, the report can set out the evidence considered, functional impacts and recommendations for ongoing care.

When a psychiatrist referral may also be needed

A psychiatrist referral is usually arranged through a GP when medical assessment or medication discussion is required. This is separate from a psychology referral, although the two can work alongside each other.

Some adults choose to begin with psychological assessment because they want diagnostic clarification, strategies for day-to-day functioning, or support with anxiety, low mood, sleep difficulties or adjustment to a new diagnosis. Others need psychiatric input early because of complex medical history, significant risk concerns or a wish to discuss medication with a prescriber. There is no single sequence that suits every person.

Clear communication between providers can reduce duplication. With the adult's consent, a psychologist may provide an assessment report to the GP, psychiatrist or other relevant practitioner. The report can describe the assessment findings and recommendations, while the medical practitioner remains responsible for medical decisions.

Preparing for an appointment without over-preparing

Adults often arrive concerned that they cannot remember enough from childhood or that they have not organised their paperwork well enough. These concerns are common, particularly where executive-function difficulties are part of the reason for seeking assessment. The task is not to present a perfect case. The task is to provide an accurate account of what is known.

It may help to bring or send available school reports, prior assessments, a list of current health professionals, and notes about major periods of difficulty or support. A short timeline can be useful: early schooling, secondary school, further study or training, first jobs, major life changes and current responsibilities. If records are unavailable, the psychologist can discuss other ways to gather developmental information.

It is also useful to identify the immediate purpose of the referral. One person may be seeking diagnostic clarification after longstanding difficulties. Another may already have a diagnosis and need psychological support with planning, workplace demands,

relationships or emotional regulation. A third may need a report to help coordinate care with a GP or psychiatrist. Naming the purpose helps the clinic advise on the most suitable appointment type.

A referral is part of a wider pathway

The most useful adult ADHD referrals give the assessment a starting point, not a predetermined conclusion. They allow the clinician to consider developmental history, current functioning and other relevant health factors in a structured way.

For adults who have carried uncertainty for a long time, the next step does not need to be every step at once. A GP appointment, a referral and an assessment booking can be enough to begin building a clearer clinical pathway.

For more information

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