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HEALTH SERVICES

How to find your way around and access care



This booklet is designed to help you learn about the main health services available in Italy. By reading it you can find out what they offer, how they work and how you can use them for you and your family.



Local Health Authority (ASL)

ASLs are the heart of health services in the territory. **They organize and provide primary and specialty health care for public health protection and disease prevention.**

Through your ASL you can enroll in the National Health System (NHS) to access all public health services. Through your ASL you can choose your general practitioner or pediatrician for your children; schedule mandatory and recommended immunizations; and perform examinations and tests at specialty clinics.

What do you need to do to enroll in the SSN? Go to your ASL with your residence permit and Social Security number to enroll and get a list of available services.

The general practitioner

The general practitioner (also called family doctor or primary care physician) is your **point of reference for everyday health**. If you have health problems, he is the first doctor you should turn to. The general practitioner visits at his or her office, prescribes tests, analyses and specialist visits. If needed, he can also make home visits. He helps you manage chronic diseases, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Prepares medical certificates (e.g., in case of absence from work due to illness).

How to choose a general practitioner? Contact your local health authority to get a list of available general practitioners in your area so you can choose the one closest or most convenient for you.

Free choice pediatrician

The Free Choice Pediatrician (or family pediatrician) is your **point of reference for your children's health, from birth to age 14**. He or she monitors their growth and offers advice to keep them healthy, recommends vaccines to be given. If your child is sick, you can contact the pediatrician and request a visit to his or her office. The pediatrician can prescribe exams, tests, medications, and can write certificates for your children (e.g., in case they return to school after an illness).

How to choose a pediatrician? Contact your ASL to get a list of available pediatricians in your area and choose the one closest or most convenient for you.

Hospitals

Hospitals are very important places for our health, to which you can turn for **problems that cannot be solved in other ASL services.**

How to access them?

- In case of **emergencies**, you can go directly to the hospital emergency room where a doctor will assess the situation, decide what tests to perform and determine whether it is best to go home or whether hospitalization is needed..
- For **specialized hospital care or surgery**, your general practitioner will request admission to a hospital ward without going through the emergency room.

Outpatient clinics and polyclinics

Outpatient clinics are health services where you can have tests, instrumental examinations (e.g., ultrasound), visits with medical specialists, and rehabilitative therapies without hospitalization. They are useful for providing you with periodic checkups or nonemergency care.

How to access them? You need a written request from your general practitioner (called a referral). With the request from your general practitioner and your health card, you can book the service through the Single Reservation Center (CUP) by phone or online. You will need your health card number and the number of the referral prepared by your general practitioner to make the reservation.

Family counseling centers

Counseling centers are **social-health services dedicated to the health of women, couples/families, and young people**. Various professionals (gynecologists, midwives, nurses, psychologists, social workers) work in the counseling centers who can help you not only with your physical health, but also with psychological and/or social issues. In many counseling centers you can also find the help of cultural-linguistic mediators.

What services can you find in counseling centers?

- Pregnancy care.
- Birth accompaniment meetings for women and couples.
- Postpartum care and breastfeeding support.
- Information and assistance for voluntary termination of pregnancy.
- Gynecological checkups.
- Information and visits for contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, menopause.
- Prevention of women's cancers (e.g., pap smear test used to prevent cervical cancer).
- Information and support in case of psychological and/or social difficulties.

How to access? Counseling centers are free and open to everyone. Even citizens without a residence permit can go to the counseling center.

Find the nearest counseling center to your home and call to make an appointment. You do not need a referral from your general practitioner.

Continuity of care service

When your general practitioner is not available, you can go to the continuity of care service where you will find a doctor who can help you during night hours (8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.), Saturdays, Sundays, and all other holidays. You can refer to this doctor for urgent but not serious problems.

How to access? On your region's health portal, you can find the number of the continuity of care service listening center. The service is free of charge for all those assisted by the Health Service in your region.

Health Homes and Community Homes

Health Homes and Community Homes are available in some regions of Italy. **These facilities can offer you both health and social care.** Here you can make visits with general practitioners or medical specialists; receive help and support with chronic illnesses or disability situations; perform examinations and receive information to prevent illnesses.

Check your region's health portal to see if these facilities are present and active in your area!

Access points and support

1. Public Relations Office (URP).

You can go to the URP if you need **information about health services and how to use them.** You can also make reports or complaints to improve health services at this office.

How to access? You can contact your ASL's URP by phone, online, or in person.

2. Single Point of Access (PUA)

The PUA is a service that caters to all people with complex needs and special difficulties (e.g., the dependent elderly, people with disabilities or impairments, with mental health or addiction problems, in difficult family situations, or victims of abuse).

The PUA activates and coordinates all necessary care.

How to access? You can request information from your ASL or municipality to contact the PUA active in your area by phone or in person.

Other useful information

- **Emergency numbers.** **112** (single European number), **118** (medical emergencies).
112 and 118 are **free numbers that are active throughout Italy, 24 hours a day**; they can be called from any phone, fixed or mobile, free of charge, even when the phone has no SIM, is locked or you have no phone credit.
- Calls to emergency numbers, access to the emergency room, admission to the hospital or use of health services by foreigners without residence permits do not result in any report to the police.
- **Regional Health Portal.** Check your region's website to find details of available local services.

Here you can find more information, in different languages, about contraception, IVG and your rights



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