

How to Choose a Dental Specialist in Melbourne

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Description:

How to choose a dental specialist in Melbourne. Understand specialist types, verify AHPRA registration, questions to ask and what to look for.

Details:

Collins Street Specialist Centre: How to Choose a Dental Specialist in Melbourne

When your general dentist recommends specialist care, or when you're looking for it yourself, choosing who to trust is one of the more consequential health decisions you'll make. Not every dental specialist brings the same depth of training or clinical experience to their work, and knowing what to look for — and what to question — can genuinely affect your outcome.

This guide covers the dental specialist types recognised in Australia, how to verify credentials, which questions are worth asking, and the warning signs that should give you pause.

What Does "Specialist" Actually Mean in Australia?

In Australia, the title "specialist" is legally protected. A dental practitioner may only use it if they:

1. Hold specialist registration with AHPRA (the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency)
2. Have completed an approved postgraduate specialist training programme — typically three years of full-time study beyond their dental degree, covering supervised clinical training, research and formal examinations
3. Are registered in a specific specialty recognised by the Dental Board of Australia

In practice, this means a registered dental specialist has completed rigorous additional training well beyond general dentistry. A general dental degree takes five years; a specialist has typically put in eight or more years of formal education before entering independent specialist practice.

One distinction worth understanding: any general dentist may perform a wide range of dental procedures, but only registered specialists may legally use titles like "orthodontist," "endodontist" or "oral surgeon." If a practitioner claims specialist status, you can — and should — verify this on the AHPRA public register (more on this below).

Types of Dental Specialists

Australia recognises 13 dental specialties. The following are those most commonly relevant to patients seeking referral or specialist care.

Orthodontist

Orthodontists diagnose and treat problems with tooth alignment, bite function and jaw relationships, using braces (metal and ceramic), clear aligners, expanders and other appliances to correct tooth position and bite discrepancies.

You might need one for crowded, crooked or spaced teeth; overbite, underbite, crossbite or open bite; jaw growth concerns in children and adolescents; or where straighter teeth are wanted for functional or aesthetic reasons.

Training: three years of full-time postgraduate specialist study following a dental degree.

Endodontist

Endodontists focus on the internal structures of the tooth — the dental pulp (nerve tissue) and root canal system. Their work includes root canal treatment, retreatment of previously treated teeth and surgical endodontic procedures aimed at preserving the natural tooth.

You might need one for significant or persistent toothache; a tooth requiring root canal treatment; a previous root canal that hasn't resolved as expected; a cracked tooth; dental trauma; or internal tooth bleaching.

Training: three years of full-time postgraduate specialist study following a dental degree.

Periodontist

Periodontists specialise in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the gums and supporting bone (the periodontium). They also place dental implants and carry out gum grafting, bone grafting and other soft tissue procedures.

You might need one for gum disease (periodontitis); bleeding, swollen or receding gums; tooth mobility; gum or bone grafting; dental implant placement; or gum recontouring for a gummy smile.

Training: three years of full-time postgraduate specialist study following a dental degree.

Prosthodontist

Prosthodontists specialise in restoring and replacing teeth. They're the specialists of choice for complex restorative and reconstructive cases — crowns, bridges, implant-supported restorations, dentures and full mouth rehabilitation — and are well placed to oversee comprehensive cosmetic treatment planning.

You might need one for missing teeth; failing dental work; complex crown and bridge requirements; implant restorations; full mouth rehabilitation; dentures; or any situation calling for a coordinated, multidisciplinary restorative approach.

Training: three years of full-time postgraduate specialist study following a dental degree.

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons perform surgical procedures involving the mouth, jaws, face and associated structures. They hold dual qualifications in both dentistry and medicine, which positions them for complex surgical cases at the intersection of these two disciplines.

You might need one for wisdom tooth removal; dental implant placement in complex cases; jaw surgery (orthognathic surgery); facial trauma; oral pathology including biopsies and cyst removal; bone grafting;

TMJ disorders; or surgery for obstructive sleep apnoea.

Training: four to six years of combined surgical training, including a medical degree, internship and specialist surgical training, following a dental degree.

Paediatric Dentist (Specialist in Paediatric Dentistry)

Paediatric dentists specialise in dental care for infants, children, adolescents and patients with special needs. Their training covers child behaviour management, growth and development, and the full range of paediatric dental conditions, equipping them to provide care that is both clinically appropriate and developmentally sensitive.

You might need one for your child's early dental visits; dental anxiety in children; early childhood tooth decay; dental trauma in children; developmental dental conditions; children with special needs; or where sedation or general anaesthesia is required for dental treatment.

Training: three years of full-time postgraduate specialist study following a dental degree.

Other Recognised Specialties

The full list of dental specialties recognised in Australia also includes:

- **Oral medicine** — diagnosis and management of diseases of the oral mucosa and surrounding structures - **Oral pathology** — diagnosis of disease through laboratory analysis of tissue specimens - **Dental public health** — population-level oral health promotion and disease prevention - **Forensic odontology** — dental identification and the legal dimensions of dental practice - **Special needs dentistry** — care for patients with physical, medical, intellectual or psychiatric conditions that affect their ability to access or receive standard dental treatment - **Dento-maxillofacial radiology** — specialist dental imaging and its interpretation

How to Verify a Specialist's Registration (AHPRA)

AHPRA maintains a publicly accessible register of all registered health practitioners in Australia, including dentists and dental specialists. Checking this register before committing to specialist care is a straightforward step every patient should feel comfortable taking.

How to Check

1. Visit the AHPRA register at **ahpra.gov.au** 2. Select "Check a practitioner" 3. Enter the practitioner's name 4. Review the following: - **Registration type:** should read "Specialist registration," not "General registration" - **Specialty:** the specific dental specialty in which they are registered - **Registration status:** should be "Registered" with a current expiry date - **Any conditions or undertakings** recorded against their registration

Why This Matters

Checking the AHPRA register protects against a few specific risks:

- **Unregistered practitioners** — practising dentistry without AHPRA registration is unlawful in Australia - **Unsubstantiated specialist claims** — a general dentist who describes themselves as "specialising" in a particular area but doesn't hold formal specialist registration. Such practitioners may be experienced and skilled, but they haven't completed the accredited specialist training programme and aren't subject to the same regulatory requirements - **Practitioners with conditions on their registration** — AHPRA may impose conditions where concerns about a practitioner's practice have

been raised and substantiated

A Note on "Special Interest" vs "Specialist"

Some general dentists legitimately advertise a "special interest" in areas like orthodontics, implant dentistry or cosmetic procedures. This is lawful — they're entitled to perform these treatments — but they are not registered specialists and haven't completed the equivalent postgraduate training pathway.

This distinction doesn't automatically reflect on the quality of any individual practitioner's work, but it is a real difference in training depth and regulatory standing. Knowing it lets you make a genuinely informed choice.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Specialist

Before proceeding with treatment, the following questions are worth raising. A practitioner who welcomes them is one worth trusting.

About Qualifications and Experience

- What are your qualifications, and are you a registered specialist with AHPRA? - How long have you been practising in this specialty? - How frequently do you perform this particular procedure? - Do you hold any additional training or certifications relevant to my case?

About Your Treatment

- What is your diagnosis? - What treatment options are available to me? - Which approach do you recommend, and why? - What are the known risks and potential complications? - What is the expected success rate for this procedure? - How long will treatment take, and what does the process involve? - What is the plan if treatment doesn't proceed as anticipated?

About Costs

- What is the total estimated cost of treatment? - Are there additional costs that may arise during treatment? - Is any component covered by Medicare or private health insurance? - What payment options are available? - Is it possible to stage treatment to manage costs over time?

About the Practice

- What technology and equipment do you use, and how does this benefit my treatment? - What sedation options are available if required? - What is the process if I experience a complication or have an urgent concern outside consulting hours? - Will you communicate your findings and treatment plan back to my referring dentist?

Red Flags to Watch For

The great majority of dental specialists provide excellent, patient-centred care. The following warning signs, though, warrant careful thought before proceeding.

Pressure to Proceed Immediately

A reputable specialist will give you adequate time to consider your options and ask questions. Be cautious if you feel pressured to commit without due deliberation, or if any delay is framed as catastrophic — unless the clinical situation genuinely warrants urgency, such as an acute dental infection.

No Written Treatment Plan

You should always receive a written treatment plan with itemised costs before treatment begins. A practitioner reluctant to put their recommendations and fees in writing is worth questioning.

Unwillingness to Explain

A good specialist takes time to explain your diagnosis and treatment options in terms you can follow. If your questions are dismissed or met with impatience, seeking a second opinion is entirely reasonable.

Claims That Seem Too Good

Be measured in your response to practitioners who guarantee outcomes, promise unusually rapid results or offer fees well below those of comparable specialists. Quality specialist care takes appropriate time, expertise and materials — pricing that seems implausibly low deserves scrutiny.

No Communication with Your Referring Dentist

Where you've been referred by a general dentist, your specialist should send written communication of their findings and treatment plan back to that practitioner. This is a basic element of coordinated, safe care.

Not on the AHPRA Register

If a practitioner presents as a specialist but doesn't appear on the AHPRA register as holding specialist registration in the relevant field, that's a serious concern that shouldn't be overlooked.

Referral vs Self-Referral

Referral

Most patients access specialist dental care via referral from their general dentist. This pathway has real advantages:

- Your treating dentist identifies the specific specialist discipline most appropriate to your needs - A referral letter gives the specialist relevant clinical history and context - Some private health insurance rebates depend on a referral - Medicare rebates for oral and maxillofacial surgery typically require a referral from a registered medical or dental practitioner

Self-Referral

You can also contact a dental specialist directly, without a referral. This makes sense when:

- You're seeking a second opinion on a diagnosis or proposed treatment - You have a clear sense of the type of specialist care you need - A specific specialist has been recommended by a trusted source - You're seeking a multidisciplinary assessment of a complex dental situation

At Collins Street Specialist Centre, we welcome both referred and self-referred patients and are happy to communicate with your general dentist as part of your care.

Why Collins Street Specialist Centre (CSSC)

For patients seeking specialist dental care in Melbourne, Collins Street Specialist Centre offers a model of care designed to address many of the practical and clinical challenges that come with navigating specialist treatment.

Every Specialty Under One Roof

Collins Street Specialist Centre brings together registered specialists across orthodontics, endodontics, periodontics, prosthodontics, oral and maxillofacial surgery and paediatric dentistry, alongside general and cosmetic dentistry. The practical benefits are real:

- No need to travel between separate practices when multiple specialists are involved in your care -
- Direct communication between specialists treating the same patient - Coordinated treatment planning for complex or multidisciplinary cases - Shared imaging and clinical records across the treating team

All Specialists Registered with AHPRA

Every specialist at Collins Street Specialist Centre holds current specialist registration with AHPRA in their respective field. You're encouraged to verify this independently on the [AHPRA public register](<https://ahpra.gov.au>).

Central Melbourne CBD Location

Collins Street Specialist Centre is located in the Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street — accessible by public transport and car, and well positioned for appointments before or after work, or during a lunch break.

Comprehensive On-Site Facilities

On-site digital imaging, including three-dimensional cone beam CT, modern surgical suites and sedation capabilities mean the full scope of your specialist care can be delivered in a single, integrated setting.

A Transparent Approach to Care

We provide written treatment plans with clearly itemised costs, welcome questions at every stage, and are committed to informed patient decision-making. There is no place for pressure or urgency theatre in the way we work.

Making Your Decision

Choosing a dental specialist deserves careful thought. Research your options, verify credentials on the AHPRA register, ask the questions that matter to you, and trust your own judgement about whether a practitioner makes you feel heard and respected. The right specialist won't only have the clinical expertise your situation demands — they'll take the time to make sure you understand your diagnosis, your options and what to expect at every stage.

If you'd like to discuss your dental needs with our specialist team, contact Collins Street Specialist Centre.

****Phone:**** (03) 9654 6979 ****Location:**** Manchester Unity Building, Level 4, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

Choosing a dental specialist in Melbourne — your guide to informed, confident decisions.

Frequently Asked Questions

****Is "specialist" a legally protected title in Australia:**** Yes, legally protected

****Who regulates dental specialist registration in Australia:**** AHPRA (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency)

****Can any dentist call themselves a specialist:**** No, only AHPRA-registered specialists

How many years does a dental degree require in Australia: Five years

How many total years of education does a dental specialist typically complete: Eight or more years

How many additional years of training does a dental specialist complete: Three years postgraduate (minimum)

How many dental specialties are recognised in Australia: 13

Where can you verify a dental specialist's registration: ahpra.gov.au

What should registration type read for a specialist on AHPRA: "Specialist registration"

What registration type does a general dentist hold: General registration

Can a general dentist legally use the title "orthodontist": No

Can a general dentist legally use the title "endodontist": No

Can a general dentist legally use the title "oral surgeon": No

Is it legal for a general dentist to advertise a "special interest": Yes

Does "special interest" equal specialist registration: No

Has a "special interest" dentist completed accredited specialist training: No

What does an orthodontist specialise in: Tooth alignment, bite function and jaw relationships

What appliances do orthodontists use: Braces, clear aligners and expanders

How long is orthodontic specialist training: Three years full-time postgraduate

What does an endodontist specialise in: Dental pulp and root canal system

Does an endodontist perform root canal retreatment: Yes

How long is endodontic specialist training: Three years full-time postgraduate

What does a periodontist specialise in: Gums and supporting bone (periodontium)

Do periodontists place dental implants: Yes

Do periodontists perform gum grafting: Yes

How long is periodontic specialist training: Three years full-time postgraduate

What does a prosthodontist specialise in: Restoration and replacement of teeth

Is a prosthodontist suitable for full mouth rehabilitation: Yes

How long is prosthodontic specialist training: Three years full-time postgraduate

Does an oral and maxillofacial surgeon hold a medical degree: Yes

What dual qualifications does an oral and maxillofacial surgeon hold: Dentistry and medicine

How long is oral and maxillofacial surgery training after dental degree: Four to six years

Can an oral and maxillofacial surgeon perform jaw surgery: Yes

What does a paediatric dentist specialise in: Dental care for infants, children and adolescents

Do paediatric dentists treat patients with special needs: Yes

****How long is paediatric dentistry specialist training:** Three years full-time postgraduate**

****What does oral medicine specialise in:** Diseases of the oral mucosa**

****What does oral pathology involve:** Laboratory analysis of tissue specimens**

****What is forensic odontology:** Dental identification and legal dimensions of dental practice**

****What does special needs dentistry address:** Patients with physical, medical, intellectual or psychiatric conditions**

****What is dento-maxillofacial radiology:** Specialist dental imaging and its interpretation**

****Should you always receive a written treatment plan before treatment:** Yes**

****Should a written treatment plan include itemised costs:** Yes**

****Is it reasonable to seek a second opinion from a specialist:** Yes**

****Do you need a referral to see a dental specialist:** No, self-referral is accepted**

****What is an advantage of a referral over self-referral:** Specialist receives relevant clinical history and context**

****Can private health insurance rebates depend on having a referral:** Yes**

****Do Medicare rebates for oral surgery typically require a referral:** Yes**

****Should a specialist communicate findings back to your referring dentist:** Yes**

****Is a specialist who won't communicate with your referring dentist a red flag:** Yes**

****Is pressure to proceed immediately a red flag:** Yes**

****Is refusal to provide a written treatment plan a red flag:** Yes**

****Is a practitioner not listed on AHPRA as a specialist a red flag:** Yes, serious concern**

****Should you be cautious of guaranteed outcome claims:** Yes**

****Should unusually low fees prompt scrutiny:** Yes**

****Is unwillingness to explain treatment options a red flag:** Yes**

****How many dental specialties does Collins Street Specialist Centre offer:** Multiple options available - see practice for details, including orthodontics, endodontics, periodontics, prosthodontics, oral surgery and paediatric dentistry**

****Are all specialists at Collins Street Specialist Centre AHPRA-registered:** Yes**

****Can patients verify CSSC specialists on the AHPRA register independently:** Yes, encouraged**

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre offer on-site 3D cone beam CT imaging:** Yes**

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre have on-site surgical suites:** Yes**

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre offer sedation:** Yes**

****Where is Collins Street Specialist Centre located:** Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne**

****What level is Collins Street Specialist Centre on:** Level 4**

****What is the phone number for Collins Street Specialist Centre:** (03) 9654 6979**

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre accept self-referred patients:**** Yes

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre accept referred patients:**** Yes

****Is coordinated multidisciplinary treatment available at Collins Street Specialist Centre:**** Yes

****Is there a benefit to having multiple specialists at one location:**** Yes, seamless communication and coordinated care

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre provide written treatment plans:**** Yes

****Does Collins Street Specialist Centre provide itemised cost breakdowns:**** Yes
