Why See a Registered Dental Specialist? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/why-seeing-a-registered-specialist-matters-for-your-dental-treatment/

Details:

In Australia, AHPRA (the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) regulates who can use the title "specialist" in dentistry. A practitioner must hold specialist registration in a recognised dental specialty, and must have completed the formal postgraduate training required for that specialty. Using the title without this registration is not permitted. At Core Dental our clinical team includes general dentists, hygienists and registered specialists. You can check any practitioner's registration on the AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au.

What does "dental specialist" legally mean in Australia?

In Australia, AHPRA regulates who can use the title "dental specialist". To hold this title, a practitioner must have specialist registration in one of the recognised dental specialties and must have completed the formal postgraduate training required for that specialty. Using the title "specialist" without this registration is not permitted under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law .

Can a dentist call themselves a specialist because they focus on certain treatments?

No. The word "specialist" is sometimes used loosely. For example, a dentist who has completed a short course in a treatment, or who treats many patients in one area such as orthodontics, may be described as "specialising in" it. This is different from holding actual specialist registration. A general dentist with a particular interest in a treatment can provide care within their scope, but this is not the same as being a registered specialist, and a dentist without specialist registration should not use the title.

How can you check that a dentist is a registered specialist?

You can check any practitioner's registration type, specialty and registration status on the publicly available AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au before you book an appointment. The register shows whether a dentist is registered as a general dentist or holds specialist registration, and in which specialty. It is a quick check, and you are welcome to ask our team to help you.

What does a standard dental degree in Australia qualify a graduate to do?

A dental degree in Australia covers the full breadth of dentistry and qualifies a graduate to apply for general registration as a dentist. Course length differs between universities, so we do not publish a single figure for it; what the Dental Board of Australia registers on is an approved qualification, not a set number of years. Graduates are equipped to provide general dental care, including examinations, fillings, extractions, root canals, crowns and dentures. For most everyday dental needs, your general dentist is the right person to see. Check-ups, preventive care, straightforward fillings, standard crowns

and routine extractions are all within the scope of general dentistry.

How much additional training does a dental specialist complete?

After completing the standard dental degree, a dental specialist undertakes further training concentrated on one area of dentistry, and then applies to the Dental Board of Australia for specialist registration.

The Board sets entry requirements rather than a course length. Its requirements, set out in full further down this page, are a qualification in the specialty, all the requirements for general registration as a dentist, and "a minimum of two years general dental practice".

Because the requirement is expressed that way, the total time involved differs between specialties, between universities and between countries. We therefore do not publish a single figure for it: any total would be right for some practitioners and wrong for others. Where an individual specialty's own professional body publishes a figure for its pathway, that body is the reliable source for it.

Source: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (page reviewed 18 March 2025; accessed 3 November 2026).

For example, a specialist endodontist focuses on root canal treatment, including more complex cases such as narrow or calcified canals, unusual anatomy and teeth that have had previous treatment. A specialist periodontist focuses on gum disease and the bone that supports teeth, including surgical care and bone regeneration procedures. Our team can explain what each type of specialist does when you ask.

When can specialist care make a clinical difference?

Specialist care becomes important when your situation is complex, when the risks are higher, or when the procedure needs the depth of training that postgraduate specialisation develops. Some examples include:

Orthodontics. Moving teeth safely and keeping the result stable requires an understanding of how teeth, bone and facial structures interact over time. A specialist orthodontist focuses on this area, including complex cases such as impacted teeth or significant jaw discrepancies. Read more about specialist orthodontists .

Periodontics. Advanced gum disease can involve significant bone loss and may need surgical treatment. Research has linked gum disease with other health conditions such as diabetes, so a specialist periodontist considers your wider health too. Read more about periodontics .

Prosthodontics. Rebuilding or replacing many missing teeth involves decisions about how the teeth meet, the bone available, implant planning and long-term maintenance. Read more about prosthodontics .

Endodontics. Complex root canal treatment, or retreatment of a tooth treated before, may be referred to a specialist endodontist. Read more about endodontics .

Paediatric dentistry. A specialist paediatric dentist focuses on the dental needs of children. Read more about paediatric dentistry .

What should you know about risk and outcomes?

Every clinical procedure carries some level of risk, and specialist training includes the management of complications and less common situations. This does not mean general dentists take undue risks. The profession is carefully regulated, and general dentists know the limits of their scope and refer when it is appropriate. Referral to a specialist for complex surgery, advanced disease management or treatment

that needs very precise planning reflects differences in clinical training, and your dentist can explain why they are recommending it. No clinician can guarantee a particular result, and outcomes vary for each person.

How can you access specialists through Core Dental?

At Core Dental our clinical team includes registered specialists as well as general dentists and hygienists, and our practitioners work together on treatment planning. Specialist services we offer include orthodontics, periodontics, endodontics, prosthodontics, paediatric dentistry and oral and maxillofacial surgery. Which specialists see patients at each clinic varies, and some sessions are held at select clinics, so please confirm availability for your chosen clinic when you book.

When your general dentist identifies that a specialist assessment would benefit you, they can discuss a referral with you. You can verify the training and registration of any practitioner independently on the AHPRA register. The question "do I need to see a specialist for this?" is always worth asking, and your dentist should give you a clear answer. You can also read our article on when to consult a specialist for a dental problem and see our dentists and registered specialists .

How do you plan your care with our team?

A useful first step is to explain your concern, symptoms, timing and treatment goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a current medicines list. Your dentist can then assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, request imaging when clinically appropriate, and explain which options are suitable.

Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what preparation and aftercare involve, and what risks or limitations apply. Treatment time, fees, recovery and maintenance vary with the diagnosis and the complexity of care. A written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, breathing or swallowing difficulty, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. Do not wait for a dental appointment in these situations. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact us promptly.

How can we help?

If you would like to know whether a specialist is right for you, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can also read about specialist care at Core Dental .

What does the Board actually require before specialist registration?

The requirements are published, and the first one is not what most people expect: before specialising, a dentist has to have practised generally.

The Dental Board of Australia states that "all applicants for specialist registration must be qualified and meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard." Those requirements include holding a qualification in the specialty, meeting "all other requirements for general registration as a dentist", and having "completed a minimum of two years general dental practice" — which "may be achieved by experience outside Australia, subject to assessment and approval by the Board."

So specialist registration sits on top of general registration rather than replacing it, and it follows a minimum period of general practice. A registered specialist has worked as a general dentist first.

Where the specialty qualification was obtained abroad, there are two further routes.

The qualification equivalence pathway. For an applicant holding a qualification the Board has not approved, the Board operates an equivalence pathway covering twelve of the thirteen specialties.

Trans-Tasman mutual recognition. Under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act, a practitioner registered with the Dental Council (New Zealand) as a dental specialist, holding a current annual practising certificate for that specialty, "is entitled to registration with the Board if that specialty exists in Australia."

Oral and maxillofacial surgery is handled separately from the rest. The Board states it "is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia", that "you must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry", and that an overseas qualification in it must first be assessed by the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons.

The Board has also worked with the Dental Council (New Zealand) to develop entry-level competencies for dental specialties, used in part to assess overseas applications.

Source: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (page reviewed 18 March 2025; accessed 3 November 2026).

Why a job title does not tell you a practitioner's scope

This is the part that genuinely surprises patients, and it is more useful than any title.

Registration tells you which division or specialty a practitioner holds. It does not, by itself, tell you what that individual may do. The Dental Board puts it plainly in its guidance to practitioners: "Your scope of practice depends on your education, qualifications, training, experience, and competence."

And then the point that follows from it: "This means that even within a division, your scope may vary from another practitioner's. You should not rely on your scope being the same as a colleagues, as your training, experience and competence may be different from theirs."

Two practitioners holding identical registration can therefore have different scopes. The Board applies the same rule to every division through its scope of practice registration standard, which requires that "dental practitioners must only perform dental treatment: a. for which they have been educated and trained, and b. in which they are competent." It also limits delegation to the same boundary: a practitioner "must not direct any person whether a registered dental practitioner or not to undertake dental treatment or give advice outside that person's education or competence."

The practical consequence is that the useful question is about the person, not the category. Asking a clinician what their training and experience is with the specific treatment you need is the same question the standard requires them to have asked themselves — and it is a better guide than a title on a door.

Titles still matter where they are protected. The Board notes, for example, that "you can only use the protected title of dental hygienist if you are registered in that division." A protected title tells you someone has met a defined standard; it does not tell you the limits of what they personally do.

Sources: Dental Board of Australia, Dental hygienist, dental therapist and oral health therapist, dentalboard.gov.au (page reviewed 18 March 2025); Dental Board of Australia, Scope of practice registration standard, dentalboard.gov.au (effective 1 July 2020). Both accessed 3 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Do I always need to see a specialist?

No. For most everyday needs, such as check-ups, fillings and routine extractions, a general dentist is the right person to see. A specialist is suited to complex situations, and your dentist can tell you when a

referral is worth considering.

Does a dentist need to be registered to practise in Australia?

Yes. Dentists must be registered with the Dental Board of Australia through AHPRA to practise. Specialist registration is a separate type of registration, and both can be checked on the public AHPRA register.

Will I pay more to see a specialist?

Fees can differ between general and specialist care, depending on the treatment and its complexity. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans. Ask our team about costs when you book.

Can I ask my dentist about their training?

Yes. You are welcome to ask any practitioner about their registration, training and experience with the treatment you need. The AHPRA register is also a reliable place to confirm registration details.

Does a specialist have to work as a general dentist first?

Yes, for a minimum period. The Dental Board of Australia's specialist registration requirements include completing "a minimum of two years general dental practice", which may be achieved by experience outside Australia subject to the Board's assessment and approval, in addition to meeting all the requirements for general registration as a dentist.

Can a specialist who qualified overseas register in Australia?

By one of two routes. For a qualification the Board has not approved, it operates a qualification equivalence pathway covering twelve of the thirteen specialties. Separately, under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act, a practitioner registered as a dental specialist with the Dental Council (New Zealand) holding a current annual practising certificate for that specialty is entitled to registration here, provided the specialty exists in Australia.

Do two practitioners with the same registration have the same scope?

No, and the Board says so directly: scope of practice depends on education, qualifications, training, experience and competence, and "even within a division, your scope may vary from another practitioner's." Registration tells you the category; it does not tell you the limits of what a particular person does. That is why asking about a clinician's own training and experience with your treatment is more informative than a title.

What does a protected title actually tell me?

That the person has met the defined standard for that division and is registered in it — the Board notes that the protected title of dental hygienist can only be used by someone registered in that division. It does not tell you the boundaries of their individual scope, which follow their own training and competence.

Can a practitioner delegate treatment to a colleague?

Only within that colleague's own education and competence. The scope of practice standard states that a dental practitioner "must not direct any person whether a registered dental practitioner or not to undertake dental treatment or give advice outside that person's education or competence."

Related services and further reading

Specialist care

Dentists and registered specialists

When should I consult a specialist for a dental problem?

Children's dentistry and our specialist paediatric dentists

Dental implants or root canal treatment: which is better?

Are you anxious about your next treatment?

Orthodontics at Core Dental

Understanding your treatment

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Our clinical team includes general dentists, hygienists and registered specialists.

Open six days a week, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Who can use the title dental specialist in Australia?

Only a practitioner with specialist registration in a recognised dental specialty, after completing the formal postgraduate training for it, can use the title. AHPRA regulates this, and Core Dental clinicians can be checked on the register.

Where can I check a dentist's specialist registration?

You can check any practitioner's registration type, specialty and status on the public AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au. Core Dental encourages patients to look up any practitioner before booking an appointment.

How long is a dental degree in Australia?

There is no single figure. The Dental Board of Australia registers dentists on the basis of an approved qualification rather than a set number of years, and course length differs between universities, so we do not publish one. What matters for your care is current general registration, which you can check at ahpra.gov.au. Every Core Dental dentist holds it.

How much extra training does a dental specialist have?

A dental specialist holds a qualification in their specialty in addition to all the requirements for general registration as a dentist, and the Dental Board of Australia requires "a minimum of two years general dental practice" before specialist registration. The Board sets those requirements rather than a course length, so the total time differs between specialties. Core Dental can explain what each specialist does.

Which specialist services does Core Dental offer?

Core Dental offers orthodontics, periodontics, endodontics, prosthodontics, paediatric dentistry and oral and maxillofacial surgery, with sessions at select clinics. Confirm availability at your chosen Core Dental clinic when you book.

When might a Core Dental dentist refer me to a specialist?

Your Core Dental dentist may suggest a referral when your situation is complex, the risks are higher, or the treatment needs the depth of training that specialisation provides. Most everyday care stays with your general dentist.

Does a dentist who focuses on implants count as a specialist?

Not unless they hold specialist registration. Focusing on a treatment or completing a short course is different from specialist registration. Core Dental recommends checking the AHPRA register if a title is unclear.

How do I ask Core Dental about seeing a specialist?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. Tell us your concern, and our team will arrange an examination so your dentist can explain whether a specialist assessment would help.