



The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

FACT SHEET: HEIGHT ADJUSTABLE BEDS

What the RACGP Standards say

The RACGP *Standards for general practices* (4th edition) require practices to have at least one height adjustable bed in their practice (refer to Criterion 5.1.1G).

Rationale

Research shows that despite the efforts of medical practitioners, policy makers and consumer advocates, people with a disability continue to experience poorer health outcomes in a range of areas compared to the broader population¹.

One of the access barriers for people with a disability has been the lack of height adjustable examination beds in general practices resulting in missed opportunities for thorough and dignified clinical examinations.

The RACGP understands that over the years the Office of the Disability Discrimination Commissioner has received many distressing accounts of the pain and frustration experienced by patients trying to use fixed height beds with some not receiving important screening examinations at all because of the inaccessibility of the examination bed at a general practice. (Refer to the Commissioner's submission on the RACGP website at <http://www.racgp.org.au/standards/fourthedition/development/submissions>).

Patients who have a disability and who experience difficulties associated with the absence of a height adjustable bed could potentially lodge a claim of discrimination against a general practice. By making height adjustable examination beds a necessary item in the RACGP *Standards for general practices* (4th edition), the College is endeavouring to ensure that general practices continue to provide high quality care whilst actively addressing their legal obligations.

At the same time, the RACGP believes the availability of height adjustable examination beds will improve the capacity of health professionals in Australian general practices to effectively examine all patients in a safe and dignified manner.

From an occupational health and safety perspective, the RACGP believes that height adjustable beds will reduce workplace injuries by eliminating the need for clinicians to over exert themselves by assisting patients onto an examination bed that is too high.

Suggested specifications

Disability advocate groups have provided the RACGP with advice on what general practices should consider when purchasing a height adjustable bed. These specifications are not obligatory but should be considered when purchasing a height adjustable bed.

- Preferred minimum range of height adjustment: 45-95cm
- Preferred minimum weight capacity: 175kgs
- Preferred minimum width of table: 71cm
- Preferred minimum length: 193cms (SK)
- Number of Sections: two sections, where the head section can be raised.

General practices may also wish to consider other specific features, for example, stirrups for gynaecological examinations.

¹ Report on access to adjustable height examination tables by people with disabilities at general practices. Physical Disability Council of New South Wales: Sydney 2009



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Access to the height adjustable bed

Practices need to consider where to best locate the height adjustable bed to ensure patients with mobility restrictions can access the bed when required.

Many general practices locate their height adjustable bed in a treatment room rather than a consultation room to avoid GPs and patients having to wait for access to the bed if it is located in a consultation room.

Branch practices

General practices with Branches should consider the 'first principle' of accessibility when deciding whether each Branch needs its own height adjustable bed. In general, patients who need access to a height adjustable bed should be able to access this facility at the Branch they normally attend or at a Branch located within close proximity.

General practices co-located with other health professionals

General practices co-located with other health professionals who have height adjustable beds (eg. physiotherapists) should consider the 'first principle' of accessibility when deciding whether they need their own height adjustable bed or whether it may be acceptable to use that of a colleague. In general, patients who need access to a height adjustable bed should be able to access this facility as required and the GP would need all the equipment necessary to conduct a thorough examination.

What to do if a height adjustable bed is not feasible in your practice

The RACGP considers there are few circumstances where a height adjustable bed would not be feasible.

The issue of cost is not considered by the College to be a significant barrier for several reasons:

- Height adjustable beds are available for under \$2000
- Grants are available to subsidise costs either through Department of Health and Ageing accreditation support grants (for practices being accredited the first time), Aboriginal Medical Services through the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 'Establishing Quality Healthcare Standards' grants, or through Worksafe occupational health and safety grants and tax deductions in some states
- Access to a height adjustable bed potentially protects the practice from complaints of discriminatory treatment.

If a practice considers it is not feasible to provide access to a height adjustable bed in their practice they will need to provide the following:

- A compelling reason why it is not reasonable
- What alternative means of care is provided to patients with impaired mobility to ensure they receive the same standard of general practice care as a patient without mobility issues.

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