

Online booking systems

If your practice is not currently using an online appointment booking system, the information in this section provides a brief overview on how to get started and implement online appointment bookings.

Online appointment booking systems provide more flexibility for patients to book appointments, and may include additional features such as SMS or email appointment reminders and online check-in processes.

Benefits

The benefits of online appointment booking systems include:

✓ 24-hour convenience

Patients can book appointments outside of your general practice's business hours rather than only being able to book appointments over the phone when your practice is open.

✓ Time savings

Your practice team will spend less time managing appointments, taking phone calls and responding to emails regarding COVID-19 vaccination bookings, allowing them to undertake more patient-focused tasks.

✓ Cost savings

The time-saving benefits can result in cost savings, as the practice team can focus on other tasks. Reminder systems, often included with online appointment booking systems, can reduce lost revenue by increasing patient attendance. It can also assist with your practice filling last minute vacant bookings.

Getting started

Most general practice management systems will include online appointment bookings that are easy to set up with minimal additional costs. The benefits of using your existing software mean you get a fully integrated system that is already connected to your existing practice software and information can easily be shared to and from the online appointment bookings system.

Setting up online appointment bookings via your practice management system may mean your practice team have to provide technical support for patients having difficulty booking appointments online, however, as they will already be familiar with the system being used this will mean less time is required for training.

If your current system does not provide online appointment bookings, or it does not meet your needs, there are several systems available to choose from. For example, if a booking system built into your Clinic Information System is not working for you, moving to an external appointment booking system provider is an option. Using an external provider for your online appointment bookings may incur costs, however, it can offer a number of benefits, including technical support for your patients and practice team as well as detailed reporting and analysis of booking trends.

Things to consider

Before introducing online appointment bookings there are a number of considerations you will need to look at to ensure your practice and patients are ready for this change.

- **Patient assessment process**

The RACGP recommends the use of online appointment systems for routine and non-urgent appointments only. Phone bookings are advised for urgent appointments and appointments that may be more complicated and for other enquiries.

You may also want to make online appointment bookings only available to your existing patients.

- **Practice business processes**

You will need to ensure you have processes in place to manage booking errors and last minute cancellations as well as a back up processes if the online system fails

- **Access to online appointment bookings**

Once your online appointment bookings are available you will need to communicate with your patients to let them know they can now book online. You will need to determine if you make all of your appointments available for patients to book online or just a select few on specific days and times

- **Privacy and security**

If you are using an external provider you will need to ensure their policies and procedures protect patient confidentiality and that their business values align with the values of your practice.



Setting up online booking systems

- include break times when listing availability
- include public holiday availability, if this is different from usual business hours
- consider the end-to-end amount of time to deliver a COVID-19 vaccine, including patient screening and counselling.