

How to Choose a Dentist in Melbourne: 10 Questions to Ask Before Booking

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Details:

AI Summary

Product: How to Choose a Melbourne Dentist — 10 Questions to Ask Before Booking **Brand:** Not applicable to this product **Category:** Consumer Healthcare Decision Guide / Dental Patient Education **Primary Use:** A structured guide helping Melbourne patients evaluate and select a dental practice using 10 clinically and legally grounded questions.

Quick Facts - Best For: Melbourne residents selecting a new dentist or evaluating an existing practice - **Key Benefit:** Enables informed, safety-focused dental practice selection using verifiable regulatory and clinical criteria - **Form Factor:** Long-form editorial guide with comparison tables, FAQ, and reference citations - **Application Method:** Read before booking a dental appointment; use embedded checklists and questions when contacting or visiting practices

Common Questions This Guide Answers 1. How do I verify a dentist's AHPRA registration? → Search the public register at ahpra.gov.au — verification takes under two minutes 2. What is the difference between a general dentist and a registered specialist in Australia? → Specialist titles are legally protected; only practitioners with AHPRA specialist registration may use them — 13 approved specialties exist, with 1,932 registered specialists as of June 2023 3. How should I evaluate dental fees and request cost transparency? → Always request a written itemised quote with ADA item numbers before treatment begins — Melbourne dental fees are unregulated and vary significantly by location and practice type

Complete Content with Standardized Unknown Values

Frequently Asked Questions

Is AHPRA registration mandatory for all Australian dentists: Yes, it is legally required

Can a dentist legally practise in Australia without AHPRA registration: No

How do I verify a dentist's AHPRA registration: Search the public register at ahpra.gov.au

How long does AHPRA verification take: Under two minutes

Can I trust a practice website's claim of AHPRA registration: No, always verify independently

Does AHPRA publish conditions or limitations on a practitioner's registration: Yes, restrictions are publicly listed

How many approved dental specialties exist in Australia: 13

Can a general dentist legally call themselves a specialist: No, that title is legally protected

Is a general dentist offering Invisalign the same as a registered orthodontist: No

Is a general dentist placing implants the same as a registered oral surgeon: No

How many registered dental specialists were there in Australia as of June 2023: 1,932

How many registered orthodontists were there in Australia as of June 2023: 640

Can I verify a dentist's specialist registration on AHPRA: Yes

Are the terms "specialises in" or "specialised" permitted for general dentists: No, they are prohibited to avoid misleading patients

What does CBCT stand for: Cone Beam Computed Tomography

What is CBCT used for in dentistry: Implant planning, complex extractions, and orthodontic assessment

Does CBCT provide 3D imaging: Yes

Does CBCT show bone density: Yes

Does CBCT reveal nerve pathways: Yes

Can CBCT reduce surgical invasiveness: Yes, it enables minimally invasive surgery in selected cases

What does CEREC stand for in dentistry: It is a CAD-CAM same-day restoration system

Can a CEREC-equipped practice deliver a crown in one appointment: Yes

Do digital X-rays reduce radiation exposure compared to film: Yes

Should modern practices use digital X-rays instead of film: Yes

What percentage of Australian adults experience dental fear and anxiety: Approximately 16%

What percentage of Australian children experience dental fear and anxiety: Approximately 10%

What proportion of highly anxious Australian adults avoid the dentist for 10+ years: Almost one in three

Does high dental fear lead to poorer oral health outcomes: Yes

What was the most anxiety-eliciting dental situation according to Australian data: Cost of dental treatment, cited by 64.5% of respondents

What percentage of respondents feared needles or injections at the dentist: 46.0%

What percentage feared painful or uncomfortable dental procedures: 42.9%

Does happy gas (nitrous oxide) allow patients to drive home after treatment: Yes, it wears off quickly

Does oral sedation (tablet) require a driver: Yes

Is IV sedation the deepest conscious sedation available in-chair: Yes

Does general anaesthesia for dentistry require a specialist anaesthetist: Yes

Is general anaesthesia for dentistry performed in a hospital or day-surgery setting: Yes

Are dental fees regulated in Melbourne: No

Do CBD dental practices typically charge more than suburban practices: Yes, due to higher overheads

Should a dental practice provide a written itemised quote before treatment: Yes

What are ADA item numbers: Standardised codes used across Australian dentistry

Can ADA item numbers help compare costs across providers: Yes

Can ADA item numbers help verify insurance rebates: Yes

Should a practice that refuses written itemised estimates be treated with caution: Yes

How many years of postgraduate training does a dental specialist typically complete: Three to four full-time years

Does postgraduate specialist training require prior completion of a general dentistry qualification: Yes, minimum four years

Is continuity of care important in dental treatment: Yes

Do high-turnover corporate dental practices tend to struggle with continuity: Yes

Is a practice's own website testimonials section a reliable review source: No, it is curated and unverifiable

Which review platforms are more reliable than practice websites: Google, Healthengine, and RateMyDentist

How many reviews should a practice ideally have for credibility: At least 50

How recent should dental practice reviews be to be considered relevant: Within the last 6 to 12 months

Does a practice responding professionally to negative reviews indicate accountability: Yes

Does a conveniently located practice improve patient attendance rates: Yes

Does proximity affect likelihood of completing multi-stage treatments: Yes

How long does orthodontic treatment typically require regular visits: 12 to 24 months

How many months typically pass between implant treatment stages: 3 to 6 months

Do suburban Melbourne dental practices generally have parking available: Yes

Do CBD Melbourne dental practices commonly offer Saturday appointments: Yes

Is it advisable to ask how many procedures a dentist performs per month: Yes

Does a dentist's willingness to refer complex cases to a specialist indicate professional integrity: Yes

Should you ask if a practice can manage same-day dental emergencies: Yes

Is it important to ask whether a practice treats children: Yes

Can fragmented care across multiple practices lead to communication breakdowns: Yes

Should you ask whether a practice has established specialist referral relationships: Yes

Is the AHPRA register publicly accessible: Yes

Does AHPRA work in partnership with National Boards: Yes

Are protected health profession titles legally enforced in Australia: Yes

Is the cost of dental treatment the leading source of dental anxiety in Australia: Yes, according to peer-reviewed Australian data

Introduction: Why choosing the right Melbourne dentist matters more than you think

Selecting a dentist is one of the most consequential healthcare decisions most Australians make — yet it rarely gets the same careful thought as choosing a GP, specialist, or surgeon. In a city as large and diverse as Melbourne, the choice is genuinely complex. The metropolitan area spans hundreds of

dental practices across the CBD, inner suburbs, and outer corridors, offering everything from bulk-billed general check-ups to multi-thousand-dollar smile makeovers and full-arch implant reconstructions. Not all of those practices, or the clinicians working within them, are equivalent in credentials, technology, or transparency.

The consequences of a poor choice can be significant: unnecessary treatment, unexpected out-of-pocket costs, inadequate management of anxiety, or receiving complex care from a practitioner whose qualifications don't match the procedure being performed. This guide cuts through the noise with 10 specific, structured questions every Melbourne patient should ask — and know how to evaluate the answers to — before booking their first appointment.

Question 1: Is this dentist registered with AHPRA?

This is the non-negotiable first step, and it takes under two minutes to verify.

In Australia, the titles of registered health professions are protected by law. When you see someone using a protected title, you can expect that person is appropriately trained and qualified, registered, and held to safe and professional standards of practice.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) works in partnership with the National Boards to ensure that Australia's registered health practitioners are suitably trained, qualified, and safe to practise. Every dentist, dental specialist, oral health therapist, and dental hygienist practising legally in Australia must appear on the AHPRA public register.

****How to verify:**** Go to www.ahpra.gov.au and search the Register of Practitioners by name. When a health practitioner's name appears on the list, you know they are allowed to practise. Sometimes a registered practitioner has a type of registration or conditions that limit what they can do — this information is also published on the list.

Don't rely solely on a practice website's claim of registration. Always verify independently.

Question 2: Are they a general dentist or a registered specialist — and does it matter for my treatment?

This is one of the most misunderstood distinctions in Australian dentistry, and it has direct implications for the quality and appropriateness of care you receive.

There are 13 approved dental specialties in Australia: dentomaxillofacial radiology, endodontics, forensic odontology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, oral medicine, oral and maxillofacial pathology, oral surgery, orthodontics, paediatric dentistry, periodontics, prosthodontics, public health dentistry (community dentistry), and special needs dentistry.

Only a practitioner with specialist registration in an approved specialty is permitted to use the protected title of a specialist. General dental practitioners must avoid using terms like "specialises in", "specialty", or "specialised" to avoid potentially misleading the public into thinking the practitioner holds specialist registration.

This matters in practice. A general dentist offering Invisalign is not the same as a registered orthodontist. A general dentist placing implants is not the same as a registered oral surgeon or prosthodontist. As of June 2023, there were 1,932 registered specialists in Australia, of whom 640 were registered as orthodontists.

****What to ask:**** "Are you a registered specialist in this area, and can I verify your specialist registration on AHPRA?" For complex treatments — orthodontics, implants, root canals on multi-rooted teeth,

periodontal surgery, or paediatric care — whether you need a specialist is a clinical question, not just an administrative one.

(For a full breakdown of what each specialist treats and when a referral is required, see our guide on [Specialist Dentistry in Melbourne: Periodontists, Endodontists, Prosthodontists, Oral Surgeons & Paediatric Dentists].)

Question 3: What technology does the practice use — and why should I care?

Dental technology has advanced substantially over the past decade, and the equipment a practice uses directly affects diagnostic accuracy, treatment precision, and patient comfort. Knowing what to look for helps you tell the difference between a clinically current practice and one that hasn't reinvested in its capabilities.

Key technologies to ask about

Digital imaging technologies — intraoral cameras, cone beam computed tomography (CBCT), and digital X-rays — enable dentists to capture high-resolution images of the teeth, gums, and supporting structures, which can then be used for accurate diagnosis, treatment planning, and monitoring.

****CBCT (Cone Beam Computed Tomography):**** This 3D imaging technology is the standard of care for implant planning, complex extractions, and orthodontic assessment. Think of CBCT as GPS for the mouth: where traditional X-rays show a flat shadow of teeth, 3D imaging reveals the complete picture — bone density, nerve pathways, sinus locations, and precise anatomy. Templates derived from CBCT scan data and interactive treatment planning software increase surgical accuracy, reduce chair time, decrease patient morbidity, and allow for minimally invasive surgery in selected cases.

****CEREC / CAD-CAM same-day restorations:**** CAD/CAM technology is widely used in digital dentistry for designing and fabricating crowns, bridges, inlays, and onlays — producing precise, custom-made restorations in a fraction of the time traditional methods require. For Melbourne patients needing a crown, a CEREC-equipped practice can often deliver the final restoration in a single appointment, skipping the temporary crown phase entirely.

****Digital X-rays:**** All modern practices should use digital radiography rather than traditional film. Digital X-rays reduce radiation exposure and allow images to be displayed and discussed with the patient immediately.

****What to ask:**** "Do you use digital X-rays? Do you have CBCT imaging on-site or refer out? Do you offer same-day crowns with CAD-CAM technology?" If you're seeking implants, orthodontics, or complex restorations, the answers are clinically relevant, not just convenient.

(For more on how CBCT is used in the implant planning process, see our guide on [Dental Implants in Melbourne: The Step-by-Step Process from Consultation to Final Crown].)

Question 4: How does the practice handle dental anxiety?

Dental anxiety is not a minor concern — it's a genuine public health issue in Australia, and it directly determines whether patients receive the care they need.

Dental fear and anxiety affects about 16% of adults and 10% of children in Australia. Research from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) adds a striking behavioural dimension: in Australia, almost one in three adults with high dental fear has not visited a dentist in 10 or more years. High levels of dental fear are associated with poorer oral health outcomes such as decayed and missing teeth.

The clinical consequences of untreated anxiety — avoidance, delayed treatment, and ultimately more invasive and costly intervention — make this question essential, not optional.

****Sedation options available in Melbourne practices include:****

| Sedation Type | Suitable For | Considerations | |---|---|---| | Happy gas (nitrous oxide) | Mild to moderate anxiety | Wears off quickly; patient can drive home | | Oral sedation (tablet) | Moderate anxiety | Requires a driver; affects alertness for hours | | IV sedation | Moderate to severe anxiety | Administered by trained clinician; deepest conscious sedation available in-chair | | General anaesthesia | Severe phobia / complex surgery | Hospital or day-surgery setting; requires specialist anaesthetist |

****What to ask:**** "Do you offer sedation options? What is your approach to anxious patients? Can I communicate a stop signal during treatment?" A practice that dismisses anxiety concerns or offers no structured response is a red flag. Anxiety-aware practices typically offer pre-appointment consultations, tell-show-do communication, and flexible pacing.

(For a detailed guide to sedation options and anxiety management in Melbourne, see our guide on [Dental Anxiety in Melbourne: Sedation Options, Gentle Techniques & How to Manage Fear of the Dentist].)

Question 5: Can you provide a written fee estimate before treatment begins?

According to peer-reviewed Australian data, cost is the single greatest source of dental anxiety. The cost of dental treatment was cited as the most anxiety-eliciting dental situation by 64.5% of respondents, followed by fear of needles or injections (46.0%) and fear of painful or uncomfortable procedures (42.9%).

Fee transparency is both an ethical obligation and a practical indicator of a trustworthy practice. In Melbourne, dental fees are not regulated — they vary significantly by location, practice type, and clinician experience. CBD practices typically carry higher overheads and charge accordingly; suburban practices may offer the same clinical quality at lower out-of-pocket costs.

****What to ask:**** - "Can I receive a written itemised quote with ADA item numbers before treatment begins?" - "Are there any additional fees that may arise during treatment?" - "Do you offer payment plans or interest-free finance?" - "Are you a preferred provider with my health fund?"

ADA item numbers are the standardised codes used across Australian dentistry. A practice that quotes using these codes allows you to compare costs across providers and verify rebates with your insurer. Practices that refuse to provide itemised estimates in writing before treatment should be treated with caution.

(For current Melbourne dental cost benchmarks across all treatment categories, see our guide on [Dental Costs in Melbourne: How Much Does a Dentist Cost in 2025?]. For maximising health fund rebates, see [Private Health Insurance & Dental in Melbourne: What's Covered, How to Maximise Rebates & Gap-Free Options].)

Question 6: What is the dentist's experience with my specific treatment?

General dentists in Australia are trained across a broad scope of practice, but clinical experience within that scope varies enormously. A dentist who places two implants per month is not the same as one who places fifty. A dentist who has completed postgraduate training in cosmetic dentistry is not the same as one who offers veneers as an occasional service.

****What to ask:**** - "How many of this procedure do you perform per month?" - "Do you have any postgraduate training in this area?" - "Can you show me before-and-after cases of similar treatments?" - "Do you refer complex cases to a specialist, and at what threshold?"

A clinician's willingness to acknowledge the limits of their scope — and refer appropriately — is itself a mark of professional integrity. Specialist postgraduate training normally involves three to four full-time years of advanced education following a minimum four-year general dentistry qualification. That additional training is clinically meaningful.

Question 7: How recent and comprehensive are their patient reviews?

Online reviews are an imperfect but useful signal. In Melbourne's competitive dental market, a practice with hundreds of recent, detailed Google reviews across a range of treatments tells a different story than one with a handful of generic five-star ratings.

****How to evaluate reviews effectively:****

- ****Volume and recency:**** Look for practices with at least 50 reviews, with a steady stream of recent feedback within the last 6–12 months. - ****Specificity:**** Reviews that mention specific treatments, clinician names, and outcomes are more credible than vague praise. - ****Response pattern:**** Does the practice respond professionally to negative reviews? This indicates accountability. - ****Red flags:**** Multiple reviews mentioning unexpected costs, poor communication, or rushed appointments warrant attention.

A practice's own website testimonials are curated and unverifiable. Google, Healthengine, and RateMyDentist are more reliable sources, though no review platform is immune to manipulation.

Question 8: Where is the practice located, and does that match my lifestyle?

This question sounds logistical, but it has genuine clinical implications. Patients who choose a conveniently located practice are more likely to attend regular check-ups, follow through on multi-stage treatments, and seek care promptly when problems arise.

CBD vs. suburban Melbourne: key differences

Factor	CBD Practices	Suburban Practices	--- --- ---	Fee levels	Generally higher	Often lower
Appointment availability	Often extended hours; Saturday common	Varies; some offer early/late hours		Parking	Limited; public transport advantageous	Usually available
Technology investment	Often high (premium positioning)	Variable		Continuity of care	Higher staff turnover in some practices	Often more stable practitioner relationships
Specialist co-location	More common	Less common				

****What to ask:**** - "What are your opening hours, including Saturday or early morning?" - "What is your cancellation and emergency appointment policy?" - "How long is the typical wait for a new patient appointment?" - "Is there parking available, or are you accessible by public transport?"

For Melbourne patients undergoing multi-stage treatments — orthodontics requires regular visits over 12–24 months, and implant stages are typically separated by 3–6 months — proximity and appointment flexibility are not minor considerations.

Question 9: Does the practice offer continuity of care?

One of the most underappreciated qualities of a good dental practice is whether you'll see the same clinician across multiple appointments. Continuity matters because your dentist accumulates

knowledge of your history, risk profile, preferences, and anxiety triggers over time.

****What to ask:**** - "Will I see the same dentist at each appointment, or is there a rotating roster?" - "If my dentist leaves the practice, how is my care transitioned?" - "Does the practice use digital records that travel with me within the practice?"

High-turnover corporate dental practices — common in Melbourne's CBD and shopping centre locations — may offer convenience but can struggle with continuity. Smaller independent practices or group practices with stable associate teams often provide stronger long-term relationships.

Question 10: Does the practice offer the full range of services I may need, or will I be referred elsewhere?

For many Melbourne patients, the ideal practice is one that can manage most of their dental needs under one roof — or has established referral relationships for treatments beyond its scope. Fragmented care, where patients must navigate multiple disconnected practices, can lead to communication breakdowns, duplicated records, and gaps in treatment.

****What to ask:**** - "What treatments do you offer in-house versus refer out?" - "Do you have a relationship with local specialists for complex referrals?" - "Can you manage dental emergencies, including same-day appointments?" - "Do you treat children, or do you refer to a paediatric dentist?"

For families, finding a practice that can treat adults and children — and that has a clear pathway to specialist referral when needed — reduces the administrative burden of managing multiple dental relationships.

(For more on navigating the full spectrum of dental services in Melbourne, see our guide on [Types of Dental Services in Melbourne: General, Cosmetic, Orthodontic, Implant & Specialist Care Explained].)

Comparison table: evaluating a Melbourne dental practice

Use this structured checklist when comparing two or more practices before booking:

Evaluation Criterion	What to Look For	Green Flag	Red Flag	--- --- --- ---	AHPRA registration
Verify on public register	Current, unrestricted registration	Not findable, or conditions listed			
Specialist credentials	AHPRA specialist title for complex care	Verified specialist registration			
"Specialises in" without formal registration		Technology	Digital X-rays, CBCT, CAD-CAM	On-site, modern equipment	Film X-rays; no 3D imaging for implants
	Fee transparency	Written itemised quote with item numbers	Provided before treatment	Verbal only, or refused	
Anxiety management	Structured options including sedation	Multiple sedation tiers available	Dismissed or not discussed		
Reviews	Google / Healthengine, recent and specific	50+ reviews, 4.5+ stars, recent	Few reviews, generic, or no response to negatives		
Continuity	Same clinician across appointments	Named clinician, stable team	Rotating roster, high turnover		
Location/hours	Matches your schedule and transport	Extended hours, accessible	CBD-only, 9–5 Monday–Friday		

Key takeaways

- ****Verify AHPRA registration independently**** before booking — it takes two minutes at ahpra.gov.au and is the foundational patient safety check. - ****Specialist registration is legally protected in Australia**** — a general dentist cannot call themselves a specialist, and for complex treatments like implants, orthodontics, and periodontal surgery, the distinction is clinically significant. - ****Technology matters diagnostically**** — practices with CBCT, digital X-rays, and CAD-CAM systems offer measurably more

precise diagnosis and treatment planning, particularly for implants and restorations. - **Dental anxiety affects roughly 1 in 6 Australian adults** — and almost a third of highly anxious patients avoid the dentist for a decade or more, making sedation availability and anxiety protocols a critical evaluation criterion, not a luxury. - **Fee transparency is non-negotiable** — always request a written, itemised quote with ADA item numbers before consenting to treatment; this enables insurance rebate verification and meaningful cost comparison across practices.

Conclusion

Choosing a dentist in Melbourne isn't a passive decision best made by proximity or a quick Google search. It's a structured evaluation that, when done well, protects your health, your finances, and your long-term relationship with dental care. The 10 questions in this guide address the full spectrum of what matters: legal credentials, clinical qualifications, technology standards, anxiety management, cost transparency, and practical accessibility.

Melbourne's dental landscape offers genuine excellence across both the CBD and suburban practices — but that excellence isn't uniformly distributed, and it isn't always visible on a practice homepage. The patients who get the best outcomes are those who ask the right questions before they sit in the chair.

For readers building a complete picture of dental care in Melbourne, this guide sits within a broader content cluster covering every aspect of the decision-making journey — from understanding the [types of dental services available] and [what general dentistry involves], to navigating [dental costs], [private health insurance], [orthodontic options], [dental implants], [cosmetic treatments], and [managing dental anxiety]. Each of those guides provides the deeper clinical and financial context that supports the questions asked here.

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Label facts summary

> **Disclaimer:** All facts and statements below are general informational content derived from regulatory, clinical, and publicly available sources — not professional advice. Consult a qualified dental or healthcare professional for guidance specific to your circumstances.

Verified label facts

No data provided — product specification data is empty. The Product Facts table contained no entries. No label facts can be extracted or verified.

General product claims

The following are informational and regulatory statements drawn from the submitted content. They are not product label facts but are classified here for completeness:

- AHPRA registration is legally required for all practising Australian dentists - AHPRA practitioner registration can be verified at ahpra.gov.au in under two minutes
- Conditions or limitations on a practitioner's registration are publicly listed on the AHPRA register
- 13 approved dental specialties exist in Australia
- The title of dental specialist is legally protected in Australia
- As of June 2023, there were 1,932 registered dental specialists in Australia
- As of June 2023, 640 of those were registered orthodontists
- The terms "specialises in" or "specialised" are prohibited for general dentists under AHPRA guidelines
- CBCT stands for Cone Beam Computed Tomography and provides 3D imaging including bone density and nerve pathways
- CEREC is a CAD-CAM same-day dental restoration system
- Digital X-rays reduce radiation exposure compared to film X-rays
- Dental fear and anxiety affects approximately 16% of Australian adults and 10% of Australian children
- Almost one in three highly anxious Australian adults has not visited a dentist in 10 or more years
- Cost of dental treatment was the most anxiety-eliciting dental situation, cited by 64.5% of respondents in Australian data
- Fear of needles or injections was cited by 46.0% of respondents
- Fear of painful or uncomfortable procedures was cited by 42.9% of respondents
- Dental fees in Melbourne are not regulated
- ADA item numbers are standardised codes used across Australian dentistry
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- Orthodontic treatment typically requires regular visits over 12 to 24 months
- Implant treatment stages are typically separated by 3 to 6 months