

How to Choose a Dentist in Melbourne — The Complete 2026 Guide

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Description:

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Details:

Finding the right dentist in Melbourne can feel overwhelming. With thousands of practitioners across the city, how do you separate genuinely excellent care from slick marketing? Whether you're new to Melbourne, unhappy with your current dentist, or simply haven't visited one in years, this guide walks you through every factor that matters — so you can make a confident, informed decision.

1. Check AHPRA Registration First

Before you even read a single Google review, verify that any dentist you're considering is registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Every practising dentist in Australia must hold current AHPRA registration, and you can check this for free at the AHPRA website.

Search by name and look for "General Registration" under their dental practitioner entry. If someone claims to be a dentist but doesn't appear on the register, that's an immediate red flag. This step takes 30 seconds and should be non-negotiable.

What to look for: Current registration status, any conditions or undertakings on their registration, and whether they hold general or specialist registration.

2. Understand the Difference Between a GP Dentist and a Specialist

Many people don't realise that dentistry has recognised specialties, just like medicine. A general practitioner (GP) dentist handles routine check-ups, fillings, crowns, and everyday dental care. Specialists, on the other hand, have completed an additional three to five years of postgraduate university training in a specific area and hold specialist AHPRA registration.

The recognised dental specialties in Australia include:

- **Orthodontics** — braces, Invisalign, and bite correction - **Endodontics** — root canal treatment - **Periodontics** — gum disease and dental implants - **Prosthodontics** — crowns, bridges, veneers, and complex reconstructions - **Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery** — surgical extractions, jaw surgery, and implants - **Paediatric Dentistry** — children's dental care

When choosing a dentist in Melbourne, consider whether the practice gives you access to specialists when you need them — or whether you'll be referred externally and left to navigate the system on your own.

3. Evaluate the Range of Services Under One Roof

One of the biggest frustrations patients report is being referred from one practice to another for different treatments. You see your GP dentist for a check-up, get referred to a specialist across town for a root

canal, then sent somewhere else for the crown. Each practice has different records, different systems, and different communication styles.

A genuinely comprehensive dental practice should offer general dentistry, specialist services, hygiene care, and diagnostic imaging all in one location. This isn't just about convenience — it's about continuity of care. When your GP dentist, specialist, and hygienist are all under the same roof, they can collaborate directly on your treatment plan.

Look for practices that engage specialists across multiple disciplines rather than relying on external referrals for everything. At Smile Solutions in Melbourne's CBD, for instance, a team of 80 clinicians — including 25 or more registered specialists across six disciplines — works from the same location at the Manchester Unity Building on Collins Street. That means patients can see an orthodontist, endodontist, periodontist, prosthodontist, oral surgeon, or paediatric dentist without ever leaving the practice.

4. Assess Experience and Track Record

How long has the practice been operating? Longevity alone doesn't guarantee quality, but a practice that has been serving patients consistently for decades has demonstrated the ability to retain both patients and clinicians — which says a lot about the standard of care.

Look beyond the practice itself and consider the individual dentists. Where did they study? What additional training have they completed? Do they contribute to the profession through teaching, research, or professional associations?

For example, Dr Kia Pajouhesh founded Smile Solutions in 1993 and has grown it from a sole practice into one of Australia's largest multidisciplinary dental centres, now serving over 300,000 patients. Dr Philippa Robinson, the practice's Clinical Director, holds degrees in dental surgery, an MBA, and a Master of Health and Medical Law — bringing both clinical excellence and governance expertise. These are the kinds of credentials that signal a practice takes its responsibilities seriously.

5. Read Reviews — But Read Them Critically

Online reviews are a useful signal, but they need context. A handful of glowing five-star reviews on a brand-new Google listing should raise the same suspicion as a string of one-star complaints. Look for:

- **Volume:** A practice with hundreds or thousands of reviews provides a more reliable picture than one with a dozen.
- **Recency:** Are patients still leaving positive reviews in 2026, or did the good ones stop two years ago?
- **Specificity:** Genuine reviews mention specific treatments, dentists by name, and details about the experience. Generic praise like "great dentist, highly recommend" is less informative.
- **Response to negatives:** How does the practice handle complaints? A thoughtful, professional response to a negative review often tells you more than the review itself.

Also check independent platforms beyond Google — health-specific directories, word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or family, and whether the practice has won any recognised industry awards.

6. Consider Location, Hours, and Accessibility

Dental care isn't a one-off visit. You'll need check-ups every six months, and treatments can require multiple appointments. A beautifully appointed practice that's a 90-minute drive away may not be practical for your ongoing care.

Factors to weigh:

- **Proximity to work or home:** A CBD location like Collins Street can be ideal if you work in the city, allowing you to schedule appointments before work, during lunch, or after hours.
- **Public transport access:** Is the practice near a train station or tram stop?
- **Opening hours:** Does the practice offer early morning, evening, or Saturday appointments?
- **Parking:** If you drive, is there convenient

parking nearby?

Smile Solutions, located at Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, is directly above the Town Hall tram stop and a short walk from Flinders Street and Melbourne Central stations — making it one of the most accessible dental practices in Melbourne.

7. Look at Technology and Facilities

Modern dental technology doesn't just make treatment more comfortable — it often produces better outcomes. When evaluating a dental practice, ask about or look for:

- **Digital X-rays and 3D CBCT scanning:** Lower radiation exposure and more detailed diagnostic imaging than traditional film X-rays.
- **CEREC CAD/CAM technology:** Allows same-day ceramic crowns and restorations, reducing the need for temporary crowns and multiple visits.
- **Intraoral scanners:** Digital impressions are more comfortable than traditional putty moulds and more accurate.
- **Operating microscopes:** Used by endodontists and other specialists for precision treatment.
- **In-house dental laboratory:** Having ceramists on-site means custom restorations can be colour-matched and refined while you're still in the chair.

At Smile Solutions, clinicians like Dr Silvia Ciach have completed over 3,500 CEREC restorations — making her one of the most experienced CEREC practitioners in Australia. The practice also has an in-house ceramics team led by master ceramist Greg Karabasis, who brings over 32 years of experience in dental technology.

8. Ask About Sedation and Anxiety Management

Dental anxiety is extremely common — some estimates suggest up to one in six Australian adults avoid the dentist due to fear. If anxiety is a factor for you, choosing a practice that takes this seriously is essential.

Ask about:

- **Nitrous oxide (happy gas):** A mild sedative that wears off quickly and is suitable for most patients.
- **Oral sedation:** Prescription medication to help you relax, taken before your appointment.
- **IV sedation or general anaesthetic:** For more complex procedures or severe anxiety, some practices offer sedation administered by a qualified anaesthetist.
- **Gentle approach:** Beyond sedation options, does the practice have a reputation for patience and empathy with anxious patients?

Practices that engage paediatric dental specialists, like Dr Susan Hinckfuss at Smile Solutions — who has particular expertise in treating anxious children, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders — often extend that same gentle, patient-focused approach to adult care as well.

9. Understand Costs and Payment Options

Dental treatment costs vary significantly across Melbourne, and the most expensive option isn't always the best — nor is the cheapest. Be cautious of practices that advertise dramatically low prices, as this can sometimes indicate shortcuts in materials, laboratory work, or time allocated per patient.

Questions to ask:

- Does the practice provide written treatment plans with itemised costs before starting work?
- Are they transparent about what's covered by your health fund and what you'll pay out-of-pocket?
- Do they offer payment plans or financing options for larger treatments?
- Do they use preferred provider agreements with health funds, and if not, why not?

A reputable practice will always discuss costs openly and provide a detailed treatment plan before any significant work begins. They should never pressure you into immediate treatment decisions.

10. Trust Your First Impression

After you've done your research online, book an initial consultation or check-up. Pay attention to the entire experience:

- ****Reception and communication:**** Were your calls or emails answered promptly? Was the front desk welcoming and organised? - ****Wait times:**** Were you seen reasonably close to your appointment time? - ****The consultation itself:**** Did the dentist listen to your concerns? Did they explain findings clearly? Did they present options rather than dictating a single course of action? - ****The environment:**** Was the practice clean, well-maintained, and professionally run? - ****Follow-up:**** Did they provide a clear summary of findings and next steps?

Your gut feeling matters. A good dentist-patient relationship is built on trust, communication, and mutual respect. If something feels off during that first visit, it's perfectly reasonable to seek a second opinion elsewhere.

Red Flags to Watch For

Be wary of any dentist or practice that:

- ****Pressures you into immediate, expensive treatment**** without giving you time to consider your options or seek a second opinion. - ****Cannot show AHPRA registration**** or becomes evasive when asked about qualifications. - ****Quotes dramatically low prices**** that seem too good to be true — corners are often being cut somewhere. - ****Doesn't provide written treatment plans**** with itemised costs before beginning work. - ****Has no visible complaints-handling process**** or becomes defensive when you raise concerns. - ****Claims to be a "specialist"***** without holding specialist AHPRA registration — in Australia, only dentists with recognised postgraduate specialist training can legally use the title.

The Specialist Advantage - Collins Street Specialist Centre

When your dental needs move beyond general dentistry into specialist territory - orthodontics, oral surgery, endodontics, periodontics, prosthodontics, or paediatric dentistry - the practice you choose should have clear, established specialist referral pathways. Smile Solutions operates the [Collins Street Specialist Centre](<https://directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/>) (CSSC) within the same Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street. CSSC engages registered specialists across all six recognised dental specialties, with shared clinical records through CareStack and in-house imaging at Collins Street Imaging. When your general dentist identifies a specialist need, the referral is internal, immediate, and fully informed - no lost records, no re-doing X-rays, no waiting weeks for an external appointment. Explore the CSSC specialist directory at [directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/](<https://directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/>).

Making Your Decision

Choosing a dentist is a health decision that will affect you for years. Take the time to do it properly. Verify credentials, visit the practice, ask questions, and trust your instincts.

If you're looking for a Melbourne dental practice that meets every criterion on this list — AHPRA-registered clinicians, on-site specialists across six disciplines, 33 years of established practice, advanced technology, and a team of 80 clinicians who have collectively treated over 300,000 patients — Smile Solutions at the Manchester Unity Building on Collins Street is worth considering.

■ ****Call 13 13 96**** to book a consultation, or visit the practice at ****Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD.****

This guide is intended for general informational purposes. Individual dental needs vary, and we recommend consulting directly with a qualified dental professional about your specific situation.