

Braces in Melbourne - Why Seeing a Specialist Orthodontist at Smile Solutions Matters

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Description:

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Details:

Introduction

Braces remain the most versatile and effective tool in orthodontics. While clear aligners like Invisalign have captured the public imagination, traditional braces - metal, ceramic, and lingual - continue to be the treatment of choice for many orthodontic cases, particularly those involving complex tooth movements, significant bite corrections, jaw discrepancies, and younger patients whose teeth are still erupting.

But here is a distinction that many patients overlook: not everyone who offers braces is an orthodontist. In Australia, any registered general dentist can legally place braces. The difference is that a specialist orthodontist has completed a dental degree plus an additional three or more years of full-time postgraduate training focused exclusively on the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of dental and facial irregularities. They are registered with AHPRA under a protected specialist title.

The gap in training matters. Orthodontics is not just about straightening teeth - it involves understanding growth and development, managing complex biomechanics, diagnosing skeletal discrepancies, and knowing when surgery is needed. A general dentist placing braces has learned the basics, but a specialist orthodontist has spent years mastering the discipline.

This article explains why the specialist distinction matters, what to look for in an orthodontic provider, and why Smile Solutions' team of four specialist orthodontists - supported by experienced orthodontic therapists and an integrated specialist team - sets a standard that few practices in Melbourne can match.

Understanding Orthodontic Treatment: Beyond Straight Teeth

What Orthodontic Treatment Addresses

Orthodontic treatment corrects:

- **Crowding** - teeth that overlap due to insufficient space in the jaw
- **Spacing** - gaps between teeth
- **Overbite** - upper front teeth excessively overlapping lower front teeth vertically
- **Underbite** - lower teeth sitting in front of upper teeth
- **Crossbite** - upper teeth sitting inside lower teeth (can affect one tooth or entire arches)
- **Open bite** - front teeth that do not meet when biting down
- **Midline discrepancies** - upper and lower dental midlines that do not align
- **Impacted teeth** - teeth that are trapped in the jaw and cannot erupt normally
- **Jaw growth discrepancies** -

upper and lower jaws that are disproportionate in size

Types of Braces

****Traditional metal braces**** remain the most common option, particularly for children and adolescents. Modern metal brackets are significantly smaller and more comfortable than their predecessors. They offer the most control over tooth movement and are often the most cost-effective option.

****Ceramic (clear) braces**** use tooth-coloured or translucent brackets that blend with the teeth. They provide the same mechanical control as metal braces but with improved aesthetics. They are popular with adult patients and image-conscious teenagers.

****Lingual braces**** are bonded to the back (tongue side) of the teeth, making them virtually invisible from the outside. They require specialised training to place and adjust, and not all orthodontists offer them. Lingual braces are the ultimate discreet option for patients who want fixed appliance treatment without visible brackets.

****Self-ligating braces**** use a built-in clip mechanism instead of elastic ties to hold the wire in place. They can reduce friction, potentially shortening treatment time and reducing the number of adjustments needed.

What to Look For When Choosing an Orthodontist

1. AHPRA-Registered Specialist Orthodontist

This is the single most important factor. A specialist orthodontist has:

- Completed a dental degree (5 years) - Completed a competitive postgraduate specialist training program in orthodontics (an additional 3+ years) - Achieved registration with AHPRA as a specialist orthodontist - Undertaken rigorous examinations and clinical training focused exclusively on orthodontics

A general dentist offering braces has their dental degree but has not completed specialist orthodontic training. While some general dentists do short courses in orthodontics, these courses cannot replicate the depth and breadth of a three-year full-time specialist program.

Ask directly: "Are you an AHPRA-registered specialist orthodontist?" It is a yes or no question.

2. Range of Appliance Options

A well-equipped orthodontic practice should offer the full range: metal braces, ceramic braces, lingual braces, and clear aligners (Invisalign or equivalent). If a provider only offers one type, you may not be receiving the option best suited to your case.

Lingual braces, in particular, require specific training and experience. If a practice offers lingual braces, it indicates a higher level of orthodontic capability.

3. Orthodontic Therapists for Ongoing Care

In many specialist orthodontic practices, day-to-day adjustments and wire changes are performed by orthodontic therapists - qualified clinicians who work under the supervision of the specialist orthodontist. This model allows the orthodontist to focus on diagnosis, treatment planning, and complex adjustments while the therapist handles routine appointments.

The result is often shorter wait times for adjustment appointments and a more efficient treatment experience. Orthodontic therapists with significant experience become highly skilled at the adjustments they perform daily.

4. Paediatric Expertise

Orthodontic treatment often begins in childhood, sometimes as early as age 7 for interceptive (Phase 1) treatment. A practice that treats children should have:

- Experience with mixed dentition (a combination of baby and adult teeth) - Understanding of growth and development and how to harness jaw growth for treatment benefit - A child-friendly environment and communication style - Ideally, access to a specialist paediatric dentist for any concurrent dental issues

5. Surgical Orthodontic Capability

Some orthodontic cases - particularly those involving significant skeletal discrepancies (jaw too far forward, too far back, or asymmetric) - require a combination of braces and corrective jaw surgery (orthognathic surgery). This requires close collaboration between the orthodontist and an oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

If the orthodontist and surgeon work in the same practice, the coordination is seamless: joint planning sessions, shared imaging, and synchronised treatment timing. If they work independently, coordination is more difficult and delays are more likely.

6. Continuity of Care

Orthodontic treatment typically spans 18 months to three years. During that time, you want to see the same orthodontist (or the same supervised team) consistently. High staff turnover - common in corporate chains where dentists rotate between locations - undermines continuity and can compromise treatment outcomes.

Ask whether the same orthodontist will oversee your treatment from start to finish.

How Smile Solutions Compares

Smile Solutions, through its ****Collins Street Orthodontics**** brand, employs four AHPRA-registered specialist orthodontists - one of the largest specialist orthodontic teams in any private practice in Melbourne. This depth of specialist coverage means patients benefit from multiple scheduling options, reduced wait times, and the collective expertise of a team that can consult on complex cases.

The Specialist Orthodontic Team

****Dr David Austin (BDSc, MDS Orth, MOrth RCS Edinburgh)**** brings a combination of Australian and international specialist qualifications. His Membership in Orthodontics from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh reflects training to international specialist standards.

****Dr Joshua Ch'ng (BDSc, FRACDS, DClinDent)**** is a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons in addition to holding his specialist orthodontic qualification. He also speaks Mandarin, providing culturally accessible care for Melbourne's significant Chinese-speaking community.

****Dr Katie Xu (BDSc (Hons), DClinDent (Orth))**** completed her specialist orthodontic training (Doctor of Clinical Dentistry in Orthodontics) and also speaks Mandarin - further expanding the practice's capacity to serve diverse patient populations.

****Dr Andrea Phatouros (BDSc, MDSc Orth, FRACDS)**** holds both a Master of Dental Science in Orthodontics and a Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons, reflecting an exceptional depth of training and examination.

Orthodontic Therapists

Smile Solutions employs experienced orthodontic therapists who work under specialist supervision:

- ****Natalie Parkes**** has over 15 years of experience as an orthodontic therapist, bringing exceptional skill to the routine adjustments that are so critical to treatment progress - ****Sarah Lawrence**** further

extends the team's capacity

This model means patients receive their adjustments promptly and efficiently, with the specialist orthodontist available for oversight, treatment plan reviews, and complex adjustments.

Full Range of Appliances

Smile Solutions' orthodontic team offers:

- **Traditional metal braces** for children and adults - **Ceramic (clear) braces** for a more discreet fixed appliance option - **Lingual braces** bonded behind the teeth for invisible fixed treatment - **Invisalign** - Smile Solutions is an Invisalign Blue Diamond Provider (the highest tier in Australia), having completed over 9,000 Invisalign cases

This breadth means the team can recommend the genuinely best option for each patient, rather than being limited to whatever system the practice happens to offer.

The Integrated Specialist Advantage

What truly distinguishes Smile Solutions' orthodontic offering is the surrounding specialist ecosystem:

Specialist paediatric dentists (3) - Dr Susan Hinckfuss, Dr Sarah Scott, and Dr Angel Babu - are available in the same building for young patients who need dental treatment alongside their orthodontics. A child being treated for crowded teeth might also need management of a cavity, an extraction of a stubborn baby tooth, or assessment of a dental injury - all available without leaving the building.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons (2+) - A/Prof Patrishia Bordbar and Dr Ricky Kumar - are on staff for patients who need orthognathic (jaw) surgery in combination with orthodontic treatment. This is a critical advantage: the orthodontist and surgeon work in the same practice, plan together, and communicate directly. There is no letter-writing between independent providers and no waiting months for a surgical opinion.

Periodontists are available for adult orthodontic patients who have gum disease that needs management before, during, or after orthodontic treatment. Moving teeth through unhealthy bone and gum tissue can worsen periodontal problems - having a periodontist in the same practice ensures this risk is actively managed.

Prosthodontists can plan and coordinate restorative work that needs to happen in conjunction with orthodontics, such as space management for future implants or crowns.

Digital Technology

- **Digital intraoral scanners** for accurate impressions without uncomfortable putty moulds - **CBCT 3D imaging** for detailed assessment of tooth positions, root anatomy, and bone structure - **Digital treatment planning** for both braces and Invisalign cases

Proven Track Record

Smile Solutions has been family-owned and operating continuously since 1993 - over 30 years. The orthodontic team has collectively treated thousands of patients. The practice has served over 300,000 cumulative patients and has won multiple Australian Business Awards for Service Excellence (2012, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025).

Comparison: Smile Solutions vs Typical Practice vs Corporate Chain

Feature Smile Solutions Typical Single-Dentist Practice Corporate Chain	--- --- --- ---	Specialist orthodontists 4 AHPRA-registered specialists None (GP places braces) May have visiting orthodontist	Orthodontic therapists Yes (Natalie Parkes 15+ yrs, Sarah Lawrence) No Varies
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Braces types available | Metal, ceramic, lingual, self-ligating | Metal only (limited) | Metal, possibly ceramic | | Invisalign tier | Blue Diamond (highest in Australia) | Basic or not offered | Provider level varies | | Specialist paediatric dentists | 3 on staff (same building) | None | None | | OMS for jaw surgery | 2+ on staff (same building) | Refers externally (weeks/months) | Refers externally | | Periodontist for adult braces | 4 on staff | Refers externally | None | | CBCT 3D imaging | In-house | Refers externally | Rarely available | | Digital impressions | Yes (intraoral scanners) | Sometimes | Sometimes | | Continuity of care | Same specialist team, family-owned since 1993 | Depends on individual | Staff rotation common | | Children's orthodontics | Full-service with paediatric dental support | Limited | Limited specialist access | | Multilingual capability | Mandarin (Dr Ch'ng, Dr Xu) | Varies | Varies |

Questions to Ask Your Orthodontist

Before starting orthodontic treatment at any practice, consider these questions:

- ☐ Is my treating clinician an AHPRA-registered specialist orthodontist, or a general dentist? - ☐ What postgraduate specialist training in orthodontics has my clinician completed? - ☐ What type of braces do you recommend for my case, and why? What alternatives are available? - ☐ Does the practice offer lingual (behind-the-teeth) braces? - ☐ Will the same orthodontist oversee my treatment from start to finish, or do clinicians rotate? - ☐ Are there orthodontic therapists performing adjustments? How experienced are they? - ☐ If my child needs other dental treatment during orthodontics, is a paediatric dentist available? - ☐ If jaw surgery is needed, is an oral and maxillofacial surgeon available within the same practice? - ☐ If I have gum disease, is a periodontist available to manage it during orthodontic treatment? - ☐ How long has the practice been operating, and is it independently owned or part of a corporate chain? - ☐ Does the practice have CBCT 3D imaging and digital impression scanners on-site?

The Specialist vs General Dentist Debate

Some general dentists argue that short courses and mentorship programs have equipped them to provide orthodontic treatment equivalent to a specialist. It is worth understanding what the specialist training involves to assess this claim:

A specialist orthodontic training program in Australia is a full-time, university-based postgraduate course lasting three or more years. It includes:

- Intensive study of craniofacial growth and development - Biomechanics of tooth movement - Diagnosis and treatment planning for skeletal and dental malocclusions - Management of complex cases including impacted teeth, cleft lip and palate, and surgical orthodontics - Clinical training under specialist supervision with a wide range of case types - Research methodology and evidence-based practice - Rigorous examination and assessment

A short course - typically lasting days or weeks - cannot cover this breadth and depth of training. While some general dentists develop competence in straightforward cases through courses and experience, the specialist is equipped to handle the full spectrum of complexity, recognise when cases are not straightforward, and intervene when treatment is not progressing as expected.

For straightforward alignment of mildly crowded front teeth, a well-trained general dentist may produce a good result. For anything beyond that - significant crowding, bite correction, skeletal discrepancies, growing children, impacted teeth - a specialist orthodontist is the appropriate choice.

Conclusion

Orthodontic treatment is a significant commitment of time, money, and trust. Whether you are considering braces for your child or for yourself as an adult, the treating clinician's qualifications and the practice's supporting infrastructure will directly influence the quality, safety, and predictability of your result.

Smile Solutions' Collins Street Orthodontics brings together four AHPRA-registered specialist orthodontists - Dr David Austin (MDS Orth, MOrth RCS Edinburgh), Dr Joshua Ch'ng (FRACDS, DCLinDent), Dr Katie Xu (DCLinDent Orth), and Dr Andrea Phatouros (MDSc Orth, FRACDS) - supported by experienced orthodontic therapists including Natalie Parkes (15+ years) and Sarah Lawrence.

The full range of appliance options is available: metal, ceramic, lingual, and self-ligating braces, plus Invisalign at Blue Diamond Provider level (the highest tier in Australia, with over 9,000 cases completed). Three specialist paediatric dentists support young patients, oral and maxillofacial surgeons are on-site for cases requiring jaw surgery, and periodontists ensure gum health is maintained throughout treatment.

This integrated specialist model - all under one roof in the Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street - means your orthodontic treatment is supported at every step by the right expertise, without fragmented referrals or disconnected providers.

For Melbourne patients seeking braces, the first question to ask is simple: is my treating clinician a specialist orthodontist? At Smile Solutions, the answer is always yes.

Smile Solutions is located at Level 1, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD. The practice is open six days a week with extended weekday hours. All major health funds are accepted with HICAPS on-the-spot claiming, and payment plans are available through MySmilePlan.