



Healthcare Services in Italy

DISCLAIMER: *For detailed and up-to-date information on healthcare services in Italy, students are advised to refer to the designated authorities. The University of Siena does not bear responsibility for the information provided in this guide, which is exclusively intended to familiarize international students with healthcare services in Italy.*

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1. Introduction

In Italy, both public and private institutions deliver healthcare services, creating a comprehensive system designed to meet the diverse needs of its population. Italians use both the public and private healthcare systems, depending on their needs, preferences, and sometimes, the urgency of their medical situation.

The backbone of Italian healthcare is the public system, the **Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN)** (i.e., the National Health Service), which offers universal coverage to all citizens and residents. The SSN is founded on the principles of equality and universality, ensuring that healthcare is accessible and free or low-cost at the point of delivery, and is generally considered to be of high quality.

2. Public Health Service Organization: SSN and ASL

Italy is divided into regions, each with its own public regional health department that has considerable autonomy in managing and organizing the healthcare services provided by the **Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN)** (i.e., the National Health Service). The province of Siena is served by the regional health service of the Tuscany region (*Regione Toscana*), through a local district called **ASL Toscana Sud Est (ASL)**.

NOTE: *ASL stands for “Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale”, sometimes also abbreviated as AUSL.*

2.1. The “Medico di Base” (General Practitioner)

In Italy, the “*medico di base*”, also known as the general practitioner or family doctor, plays a central role in the healthcare system. This physician is the primary point of contact for patients within the SSN and is responsible for providing comprehensive and continuous care. Here are the key functions and characteristics of the *medico di base*:

- **First Point of Contact:** The *medico di base* is typically the first healthcare professional a patient consults for health issues. They provide preventive care, diagnose and treat various conditions, and manage chronic illnesses.
- **Gatekeeper to Specialist Care:** If necessary, the *medico di base* can refer patients to specialists within the healthcare system. This referral process is crucial for accessing further diagnostic tests, specialized care, and hospital services.
- **Continuity of Care:** These doctors maintain a long-term relationship with their patients, offering continuity of care. This ongoing relationship enables them to understand their patients' health histories and needs better.

- **Prescriptions and Certificates:** They issue prescriptions for medication, as well as health-related certificates, sick leave certificates, and other necessary documentation.

Members of the national health service are assigned a *medico di base*, whom they can freely select from a list available at the ASL. When choosing the general practitioner, the ASL supplies the user with essential details including:

- The doctor's office locations and phone contact information
- Hours of operation for the clinics (highlighting appointment times)
- A contact number where the doctor is available from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM, from Monday to Friday

NOTE: *On Saturdays and Sundays, you can seek assistance from the “guardia medica” (medical on-call service: phone number +39 0577 36 77 73), which operates from 8:00 PM on Friday until 8:00 AM on Monday. For emergencies, it's necessary to contact the dedicated emergency number, 118.*

NOTE: *Many primary care physicians are proficient in English, and ASL staff can assist in identifying them on the list.*

2.2. “Pronto Soccorso” (Hospital Emergency)

Illnesses or injuries requiring immediate medical attention are managed by an emergency department called “**Pronto Soccorso**” found in any public hospital, offering the acute care of patients who present without prior appointment; either by their own means or by that of an ambulance.

Upon arrival, patients are triaged according to the severity of their condition. Emergency cases of acknowledged urgency are treated free of charge. For less severe cases, a modest fee (named *ticket* in Italian) is charged.

2.3. How to Call Emergency Services

Emergency services can be reached by calling the national emergency number 118 or the European emergency number 112. follow the following instructions:

1. Dial the emergency number (118 or 112).
2. Calmly answer the questions asked by the operator.
3. Provide your phone number.
4. Describe the situation (illness, accident, etc.).
5. Specify the location of the incident (city, street, building number).
6. Mention the number of people involved.
7. Report the condition of the affected individual: consciousness, breathing status, bleeding, pain presence?

8. Inform about any specific circumstances: presence of an infant, pregnant woman, or person with known medical conditions (heart disease, asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.).

2.4. Medical Prescriptions: Medications and Specialists

For most specialist medical appointments or to purchase many medications, a prescription from the *medico di base* is essential. However, "direct access" to certain healthcare services is allowed in specific situations, such as consulting with outpatient specialists (optometrist, psychiatrist, gynecologist, dentist, pediatrician) and utilizing community services (family planning clinics, mental health services, addiction services, residential services, etc.).

NOTE: *Medications can be purchased at any pharmacy. In addition to being necessary for many medications, a doctor's prescription also enables the purchase of medications at a regulated price.*

NOTE: *Specialized Healthcare services are provided by the public health system in exchange for modest fees (referred to as "tickets" in Italian).*

2.5. Enrollment in the SSN: Cost and Procedure

For international students having no income other than scholarships or grants, enrollment in the SSN is priced at 700 euros annually, covering January through December. It is not possible to pay for less than 12 months or for a period of 12 months spanning across two consecutive years.

The application for registration with the SSN can be submitted at the ASL offices located at Via Pian d'Ovile 9/11, Siena.

Required documents:

- A copy of the residence permit (or postal receipt)
- Codice Fiscale (Italian Tax Code)
- Residence certificate or proof of actual residence or hospitality declaration
- Certification of enrollment in a study program (downloadable from the UNISI online services)

NOTE: *You will be asked to sign a declaration certifying that you do not have any income in Italy other than scholarships or grants.*

NOTE: *Payment of the fee can be made at any post office following the instructions provided by the ASL offices.*

4. Private Health Insurances

As an alternative to SSN, a private insurance policy can be arranged either within Italy or abroad with any private insurance company, provided it meets the following minimum criteria:

- Validity in Italy and duration matching the stay, with specified start and end dates
- Full coverage of urgent hospital services due to sudden illness or injury with healthcare expense coverage of at least 30,000 euros
- Medical repatriation to the country of origin
- Clear instructions for filing reimbursement claims
- A legally translated version into Italian if the policy is issued in the country of origin
- A national office located in Italy for emergency contact

NOTE: *It is essential to directly consult with your insurance provider about the terms of use, such as any specific procedures required to access healthcare services, whether upfront payment for medical expenses is needed before claiming a reimbursement, what medical expenses are covered, etc.*

WARNING: *Depending on private health insurance policies that only meet the minimum requirements might lead to challenging situations in the event of medical needs.*

5. Non-EU Students

International Non-EU students residing legally in Italy for more than three months are required to have insurance coverage for health, accidents, and maternity. This can be achieved either through a private insurance policy or by voluntarily registering with the SSN.

ADVICE: *The University of Siena recommends that its international students enroll in the SSN, ensuring access to healthcare services identical to those afforded to Italian citizens.*

6. EU Students

Students from EU countries can receive medical care in Italy by presenting the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), also known as TEAM in Italian, provided by their home country's health authority.

To access healthcare services, students can directly visit any *medico di base* or any public healthcare facility presenting their EHIC. Specialized Healthcare services are provided by the public health system in exchange for modest fees (referred to as "tickets" in Italian).

NOTE: *Students must check that the EHIC is valid for international use and contains their personal details in the section for European medical assistance.*

Students with health entitlement proofs other than the EHIC should check with ALS offices for healthcare coverage conditions in Italy. Additionally, European students have the option to either obtain private health insurance or voluntarily register with the national health service (SSN).