

# COVID-19: Telehealth Services for Aboriginal Communities

29 April 2020

COVID-19 can spread quickly in our communities and many people, including Elders and those with chronic conditions (e.g. diabetes or lung disease), are at high risk of becoming very unwell if exposed to COVID-19. To keep our community and health workers safe from COVID-19, many consultations with Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners, GPs, Nurse Practitioners, Mental Health and Allied Health professionals, and some medical specialists are now available via Telehealth.

## What is Telehealth?

- Telehealth provides health care to people using video calls or telephone calls and is common in rural and remote parts of Australia. Telehealth consultations can be convenient and can address many health issues without you having to go to your Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) in person. While some people may still need to go to their clinic for vaccinations or examination by a nurse or doctor, Telehealth can be a significant change to the way that you usually get health care and help you and your community to stay safe from COVID-19.

## Who should use Telehealth?

- If you have any health issue, it is best to call your AMS first and discuss whether you could have a Telehealth consultation or need to come to the clinic in person instead. If it is an emergency, please always call 000.

## What if I feel unwell and need to see a doctor or nurse?

- If you are feeling unwell or have respiratory symptoms (e.g. fever, coughing, sore throat etc.), your AMS may be able to manage your issue via Telehealth, or you may be asked to come to the clinic in person. It is helpful to call ahead, as your AMS may need to get ready for your visit with masks and other protective equipment. In other cases, you may need a referral to make sure you get the best treatment and care.

## What if I feel ok, but need to see someone to help me sort out some things?

- If you have a health issue and are not feeling unwell with symptoms, need a prescription, or wish to discuss test results, you may find that Telehealth can help to manage your issue. Staff can help to arrange for you to be seen in person if it is necessary.

### **How much will Telehealth cost me?**

- A phone call to line up an appointment – your AMS can help to cover call costs for a consultation if phone credit is a stress. Some AMSs now have 1800 numbers, so that can help to remove costs.
- Otherwise, there should be no cost at all. You (or a parent/guardian) need to give permission and consent for Telehealth consultations to be bulk billed to Medicare, so there should be no cost to you.

### **Where will information from my Telehealth consult be stored?**

- Your AMS is required by law to keep a record of all Telehealth consultations, just like any other regular health care visit. If you give permission, your details can also be recorded onto My Health Record, so they are available wherever you go for health care in the future.

**If you are unsure about any health issue and whether you should have a Telehealth consultation or would rather just come to the clinic in person, please call and discuss this with your local AMS. Your AMS will work with you to develop a plan to help you receive the best and right care during COVID-19.**