

# COVID-19: Telehealth Information for AH&MRC Member Services

4 June 2020

## What is Telehealth?

- Telehealth refers to video and telephone calls to conduct health consultations, which are available for a range of health services by General Practitioners (GPs), Nurse Practitioners, Aboriginal Health Practitioners and Workers, Mental Health professionals, Allied Health professionals and some medical specialists.
- Telehealth is a significant strategy that ensures people can continue to access essential health services while reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and possible community transmission. Telehealth can also help to reduce the demand for personal protective equipment by health providers.

## What services are covered by Medicare?

- Temporary Telehealth MBS item numbers have been rolled-out since 13 March 2020 (due to end 30 September 2020) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting patients suspected to have COVID-19 or determined to be at high-risk or vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g. Elders, people living with chronic conditions or other factors compromising immunity).
- Telehealth is rapidly expanding to provide accessible health care to all Australians and includes routine medical care, chronic conditions management items and after-hours services.

## What are the MBS requirements?

- The MBS item numbers are different for video and telephone consultations, but the Medicare rebates are identical. (Please see the [MBS factsheet](#) with Telehealth item numbers).
- All Telehealth consultations MUST be bulk-billed for Commonwealth concession cardholders, children under 16 years of age and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19. Please also note that the bulk-billing incentive has doubled (until 30 September) for GP and Other Medical Practitioner services.

## How do I do Telehealth?

- Member Services should determine their capacity to utilise Telehealth and complement this with face-to-face consultations and other services (e.g. medical examinations, vaccinations), especially for scenarios that cannot be addressed with Telehealth. It may be appropriate to screen patients when they make an appointment, to determine their suitability for a Telehealth consultation, or whether they should be advised to present to their health provider in person.

- There are no specific equipment requirements for Telehealth. Different service platforms (e.g. Zoom, Skype) and software may be used (HealthDirect video is free to ACCHSs until 30 September), or simply a phone call might be enough. Before proceeding with a Telehealth consultation, patient privacy and consent is required, along with completing appropriate documentation in patient medical records.
- It is not necessary for patients requesting a Telehealth consultation to be previously known to the selected health service or provider. Most patients are likely to be known and have prior medical records available to review, but accessing My Health Record may also be helpful for new patients.

### Where can I get help?

- While transitioning to Telehealth may bring new challenges, Member Services requiring further information or support can contact AH&MRC as below:
  - Practice support queries to AH&MRC's Practice Support Team at [practicesupport@ahmrc.org.au](mailto:practicesupport@ahmrc.org.au)
  - Technical & equipment queries to AH&MRC's Data and Systems Manager, Dean Wright at [dwright@ahmrc.org.au](mailto:dwright@ahmrc.org.au)
  - General queries to [Covid19@ahmrc.org.au](mailto:Covid19@ahmrc.org.au)
- AH&MRC is partnering with NSW Rural Doctors Network to support rollout of Telehealth, and we would encourage Members to reach out to RDN Regional Project officers.
- **For more information** about Telehealth, MBS item numbers and factsheets please visit:
  - [MBS Online website](#)
  - [Agency for Clinical Innovation \(ACI\) Telehealth information](#)
  - [RACGP Telehealth information](#)