

**The changes to Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) telehealth items, Practice Incentive Programs (PIP) Quality Improvement (QI) funding, digital referrals, e-prescribing and other government initiatives have provided new ways to help protect our clinicians and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## WHAT ARE THE NEW TELEHEALTH RULES?

One of the critical changes is the expansion of the MBS to include temporary telehealth item numbers that are available from 13 March 2020 to 30 September 2020 (inclusive).

On 29 March 2020, the Minister for Health announced that telehealth services would be expanded to all Australians in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 'Whole of population' telehealth services were introduced on 30 March 2020.

From 6 April 2020, it is a legislative requirement that the new telehealth services must be bulk billed for:

- Commonwealth concession card holders
- Children under 16 years old
- Patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>

Health providers may apply their usual billing practices to the telehealth items for all other patients (i.e. those who are not concession card holders, aged under 16 or considered at risk of COVID-19).

Telehealth may only be used where it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so.

Please note that information is updated regularly on the MBS Online website. Fact Sheets are available [here](#).

Please continue to check MBS Online regularly for any further announcements.

## JULY UPDATE: CONTINUOUS CARE WITH TELEHEALTH STAGE SEVEN

From 20 July 2020, GP providers will be required to have an existing and continuous relationship with a patient in order to provide telehealth services.

Patients will now only be able to access telehealth services under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) through their regular GP or practice, where:

- They have been an active patient within the past 12 months;
- Have seen a doctor at the same practice for a face-to-face service during the same period;
- Or through a referred non-GP specialist.

The changes will not apply to:

- Infants (under 12 months old)
- The homeless
- People living in COVID-19 hotspots
- Those living under stage three restrictions in Victoria

### For more about this announcement:

Department of Health media release

RACGP eNews

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<sup>1</sup> 'Patient at risk of COVID-19 virus' means a person who:  
a. is required to self-isolate or self-quarantine in accordance with guidance issued by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee in relation to COVID-19; or  
b. is at least 70 years old; or  
c. if the person identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent—is at least 50 years old; or  
d. is pregnant; or  
e. is the parent of a child aged under 12 months; or  
f. is being treated for a chronic health condition; or  
g. is immune compromised; or  
h. meets the current national triage protocol criteria for suspected COVID-19 infection.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOUR LOCUM PLACEMENT?

As always, please contact the practice directly before starting your placement to confirm arrival, and to re-confirm locum placement details. This discussion should include telehealth arrangements at the practice, and any support you may require during the placement.

In light of the Stage 7 telehealth reforms announced in July, you will be able to claim Medicare rebates for telehealth using your provider number as long as the patient fulfils the criteria at the practice you are providing locum services to (has fulfilled the active patient requirement by having attended a face-to-face consultation at the same practice within the last 12 months).

Enquiries relating to the COVID-19 telehealth MBS items can be sent to [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

## USEFUL TELEHEALTH RESOURCES:

**ACRRM** - eHealth website

**ACRRM** - telehealth standards framework

**Australian Government Department of Health** - COVID-19 telehealth items guide

**BMJ** - visual summary of remote consultations for COVID-19

**MBS Online** - overview of temporary MBS telehealth service created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the Department of Health (regularly updated).

**RACGP** - guide to providing telephone and video consultations in general practice.

**RACGP** - guide to new MBS items for COVID-19 telehealth services