



Covid-19 **Telehealth**

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24 March 2020

TELEHEALTH FAQ

On 11th March 2020 new telehealth item numbers were added to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), these items are claimable from 13th March 2020. As details of the new MBS items continue to develop, [Medicare's webpage](#) regarding the new telehealth items (and associated fact sheets) will be updated.

The temporary items allow doctors to deliver services via videoconference and phone to patients to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The Government has determined that these items can only be bulk billed.

AMA NSW has collated a list of frequently asked questions below. If your question has not been answered, please contact our Workplace Relations team by emailing workplace@amansw.com.au.

Please note: the information provided by the Department of Health is being updated regularly. We recommend staying up to date by frequently reviewing the information on the Department of Health's webpage [here](#).

Who is eligible?

Medicare rebates will be paid for services provided to:

- people isolating themselves at home on the advice of a medical practitioner or in accordance with home isolation guidance issued by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC);
- people who meet the testing guidelines for COVID-19;
- people aged over 70;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50;
- people with chronic health conditions or who are immunocompromised; and
- parents with new babies and people who are pregnant.

I'm a doctor who is vulnerable to COVID-19, can I use telehealth for all my patients?

From 23 March 2020, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, **announced** that the Government will enable all vulnerable general practitioners and other vulnerable health professionals who are currently authorised to use telehealth item numbers, to use telehealth for all consultations with all their patients.

This includes health care providers who are:

- Aged at least 70 years old.
- Indigenous and aged at least 50 years old.
- Pregnant.
- A parent of a child under 12 months.
- Immune compromised.
- Have a chronic medical condition that results in increased risk from coronavirus infection.

How do I determine whether my chronic medical condition results in increased risk from COVID-19 infection?

AMA (NSW) recommends all doctors have a general practitioner to look after their health. We recommend speaking to your general practitioner in the first instance for advice on whether your chronic medical condition places you at increased risk from COVID-19 infection.

If you are a doctor and are looking for a general practitioner who is interested in taking on doctors as patients please look through the 'Doctors for Colleagues' register on the AMA NSW website [here](#).

TELEHEALTH **FAQ**

Will all medical practitioners be eligible to provide telehealth services to all patients (regardless of vulnerability and/or isolation) soon?

It is expected that a more comprehensive telehealth whole of population model of care will be confirmed shortly. This would be considered a Stage four response. You can find more information about this [here](#).

Should I use video or telephone?

According to the Department of Health, videoconference services are the preferred approach for substituting face-to-face consultations. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providers will also be able to offer audio-only services via telephone if video is not available. There are separate items available for audio-only services.

Is there a preferred video platform that I should use (i.e. Skype, Zoom etc.)?

There is no preferred platform to provide Medicare-compliant telehealth services. Services can be provided through widely available video calling apps and software such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Duo, GoToMeeting and others.

Do I bill both the existing item number and the new COVID-19 telehealth item number?

No, you bill one or the other depending on whether you saw the patient face to face, via videoconference or by telephone. The telehealth item descriptors mirror those of existing face to face consultation items (equivalent items can be found in a table [here](#)).

Can I charge a fee on top of the bulk-billed telehealth items?

No. The Government has advised that practitioners who wish to use the COVID-19 MBS telehealth items must agree to bulk bill them.

Can I charge patients privately for telehealth services?

If you do not want to use the new telehealth item numbers you can charge patients privately to provide services via videoconference or telephone, however, these services will not attract a Medicare benefit for the doctor or the patient. These services should not be submitted to Medicare.

Does the patient still need to assign their benefit to the practitioner for bulk-billed telehealth or telephone services?

Even though you and the patient aren't at the same location during a telehealth video consultation, under section 20A of the Health Insurance Act 1973 the patient's signature is still needed on the General, Specialist and Diagnostic (assignment of benefit) form (DB4). You can get this form through Medicare Bulk Bill Webclaims using **HPOS**.

The process for a patient to assign their benefit for a telehealth or **telephone consultation is outlined here**.

How can I submit Medicare bulk bill claims electronically?

You have a few options. You can either talk to your practice software provider for further information or submit Medicare bulk bill claims electronically for real time assessment through HPOS. You can find more information about submitting Medicare bulk bill webclaims electronically [here](#).

TELEHEALTH FAQ

Am I covered by my Medical Defence Organisation (MDO) to provide telehealth services?

The AMA understands that medical indemnity insurance will cover telehealth activities under practitioner cover, provided you deliver the service in accordance with relevant guidelines and observe any specific requirements for telehealth set by your Medical Defence Organisation.

If you have any specific questions, please call your MDO for individual advice.

I'm a specialist, do I still require a referral from a patient to see them via telehealth?

Yes. You will still need a referral from a General Practitioner.

I have questions about one of the new telehealth item numbers, where can I find more information?

You can search for item descriptions by using the search function (in the top right corner) of the [MBS online website](#).

Do loadings apply to the new COVID-19 telehealth item numbers?

No. Unless specified in the item description, the COVID-19 telehealth item numbers do not attract loadings.

Where can I download the XML file for the new item numbers?

You can download the XML [file here](#).

What are the professional requirements I need to meet when conducting a telehealth consultation?

Medical practitioners are reminded that The Medical Board of Australia's **Good medical practice: a code of conduct for doctors in Australia** still applies to consultations provided via telehealth.

It is important that your chosen telecommunications solution meets your clinical requirements and satisfies privacy laws. You can access the Medical Board's Guidelines for technology-based patient consultations [here](#).

You should always be able to:

- Verify the identity of the patient
- Keep appropriate records of the consultation
- Access information about the patient's past medical history to ensure that any prescriptions provided are appropriate.
- Ensure that processes remain in place for informed consent
- Ensure the privacy of patients is protected.

The MBS items I use are not available or have impractical rules associated – what can I do?

Our Federal counterparts are working closely with the Department of health to address these issues. If you feel that your speciality has been ignored or there are other issues with the COVID-19 telehealth items, you can contact AMA Federal directly about this by emailing covid19@ama.com.au. Alternatively, email us at workplace@amansw.com.au and we will happily pass on your concerns.



If you have any questions in relation to this document or the issues raised, please contact our **Workplace Relations team on 02 9439 8822 or email workplace@amansw.com.au**

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Disclaimer: The information in this document is of a general nature only and does not constitute legal advice. We have made every attempt to ensure that the information and any links contained in this document are accurate as at the date of drafting. AMA (NSW) will not be liable for any decision made or action taken in reliance on the information in this document. It is for general guidance only and should not be used as a substitute for obtaining specific assistance or advice.



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MARCH 2020