



## **The Hon. Greg Hunt MP**

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet

## **Professor Michael Kidd AM**

Principle Medical Advisor

The Presidents of the Australian Medical Association  
Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine  
Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges National  
Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation  
Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners  
Rural Doctors Association of Australia  
Allied Health Professionals Australia  
Australian Psychological Society  
Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association

## **JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT**

29 March 2020

### **COVID-19: WHOLE OF POPULATION TELEHEALTH FOR PATIENTS, GENERAL PRACTICE, PRIMARY CARE AND OTHER MEDICAL SPECIALISTS**

To provide continued access to essential primary health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government is expanding Medicare-subsidised telehealth services for all Australians and providing extra incentives to general practitioners and other health practitioners.

These critical changes have been designed in partnership with key stakeholders in the sector including the Australian Medical Association, Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Rural Doctors Association of Australia, Allied Health Professionals Australia, Australian Psychological Society, and the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association.

We are making telehealth a key weapon in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Expanding the consultation services available by telehealth is the next critical stage in the Government's response to COVID-19.

Services will include GP services and some consultation services provided by other medical specialists, nurse practitioners, mental health treatment, chronic disease management, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments, services to people with eating disorders, pregnancy support counselling, services to patients in aged care facilities, children with autism, and after-hours consultations.

These changes represent the fourth stage of a series of primary care measures and will commence from 8am Monday 30 March.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

Australia's primary health workers are our frontline in leading the fight against this pandemic. Services via telehealth will limit unnecessary exposure of patients and health professionals to COVID-19, wherever treatment can be safely delivered by phone or videoconferencing.

This will take pressure off hospitals and emergency departments. Whole of population telehealth will allow people to access essential health services in their home and will support self-isolation and quarantine policies to reduce risk of exposure and spread of COVID-19. It will also help vulnerable doctors to continue to deliver services to their patients.

The Government will double the bulk billing incentive for GPs both for face-to-face and telehealth services during the course of the COVID-19 response.

Doubling the bulk billing incentive will facilitate sustainable support for providers, and ensure concession and other vulnerable patients who need services continue to be provided with free, timely and appropriate access.

Further changes will be introduced during the week that will allow GPs and other providers to apply their usual billing practices to telehealth consultations, while concessional and vulnerable patients will continue to receive services at no cost.

In addition, the Government will establish an incentive payment to ensure practices stay open to provide face-to-face services where they are essential for patients with conditions that can't be treated through telehealth.

The Government will continue to work on a further expansion of non-GP specialist telehealth under stage 5 in collaboration with the profession.

Our number one priority is protecting and supporting Australians who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

We are ensuring there are no unintended barriers to services for vulnerable patients. At the same time, we need to support GPs to keep their doors open during these extremely difficult times. These initiatives will support both them and their patients.

Patients should talk to their regular doctors about their most appropriate course of care, whether it should be via telehealth or face-to-face.

The new arrangements will commence on Monday 30 March and will be in place until 30 September 2020, when they will be reviewed in light of the need to continue our battle against COVID-19.

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