

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**EXTEND TEMPORARY TELEHEALTH BY END OF MONTH**

The AMA has written to Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who is the acting Health Minister, calling on the Federal Government to extend until the end of the year temporary telehealth arrangements under Medicare that have supported patients to have a consultation with their doctor either over the phone or by video.

These arrangements, which were put in place as part of the Government’s COVID-19 response and further extended last year, will end on 31 March if not extended.

“The current uncertainty over the future of temporary COVID 19 Medicare telehealth items means that patients and practices can’t plan consultations beyond the end of this month, even though we are still in the middle of the pandemic,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

“With the emergence of new and more transmissible COVID-19 variants, the community continues to live with the ever-present threat of tightened restrictions and lockdowns. For medical practices to be able to continue to deliver services to patients when these happen, telehealth remains an essential part of practice.

“While the level of community transmission has been at or around zero for some months and the vaccine rollout has commenced, the pandemic is far from over and we cannot become complacent.

“We must continue to plan for the worst and ensure that continuity of care can be maintained for patients.

“Temporary Medicare telehealth items have supported the provision of care during these very difficult times and contributed to efforts to contain the spread of the virus. Telehealth has been embraced by doctors and the public alike.

“It was not that long ago that Victoria and most of Western Australia were in lockdown, and snap lockdowns remain an option for any State or Territory having to deal with a future outbreak.

“Telehealth remains fundamental to our national efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 and ending the temporary arrangements in a couple of weeks would be premature.

“The telehealth arrangements also ensure that patients who are self-isolating can still access care.

“The AMA has been in discussions with the Department of Health about a long-term plan for telehealth, and we know that the Government is committed to making it a permanent feature of our health system.

“However, in the short term, we need a telehealth framework that can operate in the context of a pandemic response.”

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