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TIME TO EXTEND TELEHEALTH FURTHER

The AMA is again calling on the Government to extend temporary COVID-19 Medicare Telehealth items until the end of the year. The current outbreak in Queensland highlights that the June extension does not go far enough.

“The Queensland outbreak and the flow-on impact on other states is a timely reminder that the pandemic is far from over,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid said.

“With the emergence of new and more transmissible COVID-19 variants, it is unlikely that this will be the last lockdown before the end of the year.

“But we cannot become complacent. We must continue to plan for the worst.

“We know that every time there is an outbreak, thousands of people face requirements to self-isolate and telehealth ensures these patients can continue to assess care.

“Telehealth remains fundamental to the national effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, by protecting the health workforce, while reducing the need for unwell patients to move around the community.

“We need to maintain continuity of care for patients during any future lockdown.

“We need a telehealth framework that can operate in the context of a pandemic response, which is exactly what these temporary telehealth items are designed to do,” AMA President Dr Khorshid said.

The AMA understands that the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has previously recommended the current temporary COVID-19 Medicare Telehealth items be extended until the end of the year.

The AMA calls on the Government to take this expert medical advice.

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. But the temporary items will continue to be required until the pandemic ends, and a permanent telehealth solution is designed and implemented.

“Being able to reassure all Australians that the temporary telehealth items remain in place for the whole year, supporting a doctor to be at the other end of the phone during any future lockdowns, is peace of mind the Government can deliver right now,” Dr Khorshid said.

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