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**TELEHEALTH MUST REMAIN AN INTEGRAL PART OF
 AUSTRALIAN HEALTH SYSTEM**

*AMA Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Financial Technology and Regulatory
 Technology*

The AMA will today reiterate its call for broader access to Medicare-funded telehealth consultations with GPs and non-GP specialists to remain an integral part of the health system beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, will appear before the Senate Select Committee on Financial Technology and Regulatory Technology at 10.55am today to discuss the AMA submission, which promotes the retention of telehealth initiatives.

Dr Bartone said that around 20 per cent of all Medicare-funded consultations with a doctor are now being provided by telehealth, either over the phone or via video, since temporary Medicare telehealth items were introduced in March in response to COVID-19.

“Patients are clearly making the case for telehealth consultations to become a permanent feature of our health system for both GPs and non-GP specialists,” Dr Bartone said.

“Telehealth is the norm in many parts of the world, providing patients with a convenient option to access care where they don’t need a physical examination. And the AMA has long championed the case for the introduction and expansion of telehealth in Australia.

“Telehealth is not a substitute for face-to-face visits to the doctor, but it does provide a cost-effective option that can supplement traditional visits.

“Telehealth delivers economic efficiencies in how medical practices work, and provides benefits to patients through more flexible access to care.

“The initial decision to open up Medicare funding for telehealth services was driven by the need to reduce the risks of the transmission of COVID-19 and to protect vulnerable patients.

“But it has also given us the opportunity to trial telehealth in the Australian context – with current arrangements due to expire in September.

“It has been an outstanding success that is supporting high-quality patient care from both GPs and non-GP specialists – and it should continue for the long term.

“We must now turn to the task of fully integrating telehealth into day to day medical practice according to best practice standards to ensure continuity of care for patients.

“Most GP telehealth consultations to date have been in circumstances where a patient has an existing relationship with a GP, but we have also seen the increasing emergence of ‘pop-up’ telehealth models and other models that are linked to pharmacies.

“These arrangements fragment care and blur the important distinction between the prescribing and dispensing of medicines. They must be stopped.

“For telehealth in general practice, we need to build on what is key to our very successful primary care system - the relationship between a usual GP and a patient.

“This means that GP telehealth consultations need to be restricted to a patient’s usual GP or usual general practice.

“Health Minister, Greg Hunt, has already acknowledged the success of telehealth, and the Government is actively considering how it can continue beyond the current interim arrangements.

“The AMA is working closely with the Minister to provide the Government with advice on how to move forward on the permanent retention of Medicare-funded telehealth arrangements, recognising that they need to be underpinned by a sustainable model that supports good medical practice.

“The great step forward during the current COVID19 crisis is that telehealth means that patients have no reason not to access care from their doctor.

“It is critical that people continue to look after their overall health. As COVID-19 restrictions are eased, the local doctor’s practice is one of the safest places to visit.

“It is important to maintain the doctor-patient relationship. Telehealth will ensure continuity of care to complement that trusting relationship.”

Dr Bartone said the AMA also supports the Government’s long overdue decision to fast-track the implementation of ePrescriptions by mid-2020, after many years of confusing and protracted attempts to introduce a simple 21st century solution to what is, ultimately, such a simple process.

The AMA submission is at <https://ama.com.au/submission/ama-submission-senate-select-committee-financial-technology-and-regulatory-technology>

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