

Medicare rebates for GP telehealth consultations

Key Issues

Telehealth has the potential to considerably enhance access to general practitioner services for specific patient groups and deliver productivity gains in general practice.

However, Medicare rebates for video consultations in general practice are not available and currently apply for referred specialist consultations only.

Patient consideration

Telehealth could considerably enhance access to general practitioner services for: Indigenous populations in remote Australia; residents of aged care facilities; and for rural, remote and outer metropolitan patients who have difficulty attending general practices because of mobility problems or because of distance.

Government consideration

The delivery of health services to Indigenous populations in remote Australia is almost exclusively through remote health centres.

Medical care is provided by specialised GPs who reside in urban centres such as Darwin or Alice Springs. These practitioners could enhance their face-to-face care of Indigenous populations with video consultations from urban centres to remote locations.

The AMA has highlighted problems with ongoing access to medical care for residents of aged care facilities for many years.

The Federal Government's telehealth initiative provides incentives for aged care providers to set up video conferencing facilities. It is extremely inefficient for these facilities to be used only for referred specialist consultations.

Medicare rebates for GP video consultations with residents of aged care facilities would improve the efficiency of providing follow-up care by GPs, and ensure full use is made of existing Government-funded video consultation facilities in aged care centres.

Similarly, there are rural, remote and outer metropolitan patients who have difficulty attending general practices because of mobility problems or because of distance.

AMA position

The AMA calls on the major parties to introduce specific MBS rebates for GP telehealth consultations by a patient's usual GP for:

- After-hours services;
- Patients with a GP Management Plan;
- Patients with mobility problems; and
- Patients in residential aged care facilities.

For further information on this issue please contact Nick Elmitt on 02 6270 5400 or nelmitt@ama.com.au