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# **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **EXPANSION OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES**

We thank and acknowledge all of Australia's vital health care workers for their ongoing commitment and dedication to providing Australians with the health care they need during this unprecedented time.

The Government has been consulting extensively with the AMA, RACGP, ACCRM, RDAA, and other key peak bodies and members of the medical profession and health professions, to ensure Medicare is responsive to the challenges of COVID-19.

Amendments to Medicare are being implemented quickly, but also in a staged and proportionate way to ensure critical health services can continue to operate, and the integrity of our health system is maintained.

The Government is also consulting with the AMA, RACGP, ACCRM, RDAA and other critical parts of the medical profession during the course of this week to further expand our telehealth response.

The co-design will look to the best practise expansion of telehealth items for all patients, with or without COVID-19, to see any general practitioner or medical specialist during the COVID-19 health emergency.

From today, the Government will enable all vulnerable general practitioners and other vulnerable health professionals who are currently authorised to use telehealth item numbers, to use telehealth for all consultations with all their patients.

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

This includes health care providers who are:

- Aged at least 70 years old.
- Indigenous and aged at least 50 years old.
- Pregnant.
- A parent of a child under 12 months.
- Immune compromised.
- Have a chronic medical condition that results in increased risk from coronavirus infection.

This change will help protect the most vulnerable members of our health care workforce, while allowing them to continue to provide much needed medical care and advice to their patients.

It builds on a series of changes the Government has made in recent weeks, to create a more responsive and flexible Medicare system that meets the needs of patients and providers during this crisis.

It is expected a more comprehensive telehealth whole of population model of care and the detail of telehealth operations via phone and video will be confirmed by the end of this week as Stage four. This will include mental health and allied health consultations.

It is important that this is done carefully to ensure these new items do not have unintended adverse consequences for patients or the health system, while allowing general practitioners and medical specialists to continue to work during the pandemic, using phone and video where clinically appropriate.

We recognise telehealth is not appropriate for the management of all health care problems and in many cases face-to-face consultations will still be needed. It is imperative Australians continue to receive the high quality medical care and advice they expect and deserve from their health care providers. We cannot risk a reduction in the standard of medical care provided to the people of Australia.

We emphasise the importance of using telehealth item numbers responsibly, appropriately and for the right reasons during this pandemic. For details on when telehealth items can be used please consult [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au)

This is new territory for many health care providers, who want to meet the challenges of providing health care during this medical crisis.

Many important questions and challenges have been raised, and we continue to work through these. We will continue to communicate changes on the Government website [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au), with regular webinar updates listed online, and through peak bodies.

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

STAGE	COVID-19 MBS Telehealth Items
<b>Stage 1</b> March 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government began progressively opening access under the Medicare Benefits Schedule to telehealth for many consultations between with patients and their general practitioners, mental health providers and medical specialists, where patients or GP's were required to self-isolate, or patients were considered vulnerable.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2</b> WC March 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of MBS Telehealth items for midwives and recognise a general practice for continuity of care practises (rather than an individual GP)</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3 -            CURRENT            STATUS</b> WC March 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From today the Government will allow all vulnerable general practitioners and other vulnerable health professionals who are currently authorised to use telehealth item numbers, to use telehealth for all consultations with all their patients. This includes health care providers who are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged at least 70 years old.</li> <li>• Indigenous and aged at least 50 years old.</li> <li>• Pregnant.</li> <li>• A parent of a child under 12 months.</li> <li>• Immune compromised.</li> <li>• Have a chronic medical condition that results in increased risk from coronavirus infection.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Stage 4</b> Moving Towards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government is consulting with the AMA, RACGP ACRRM, RDAA to co-design stage four of our telehealth whole of population response. The co-design will look to the best practise expansion of telehealth items for all patients, with or without COVID-19, to see any general practitioner, medical specialist, mental health or allied health professional during the COVID-19 health emergency.</li> </ul>

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