



Australian Government
Department of Health

Better Access Telehealth initiative for rural and remote patients

Guidelines

Introduction

1. On 19 April 2017, the Australian Government announced the introduction of a new measure to improve access to mental health treatment services for people in rural, remote and very remote locations (Modified Monash Model areas 4 - 7).
2. From 1 November 2017, patients in rural and remote locations are able to claim rebates for video consultations through the Medicare Benefits Schedule Better Access initiative.
3. The changes implemented in 2017 allowed up to seven of ten Better Access mental health consultations to be provided via videoconference (Better Access Telehealth initiative).
4. In addition, one of the first four sessions was required to be delivered through a face-to-face consultation to facilitate a personal connection with the mental health professional.
5. On 5 August 2018, the Australian Government announced changes to the measure so that people can access Medicare Better Access services via videoconference without leaving home.
6. From 1 September 2018, all ten consultations can be delivered via videoconference without the requirement for a face-to-face consultation.
7. For existing patients who commenced Better Access telehealth services prior to 1 September 2018, the face-to-face requirements will no longer apply to any remaining allowable sessions from 1 September 2018.
8. There are no changes to other conditions of the service, including time, number of allowable sessions per year, referral requirements, or co-payment arrangements.
9. These announcements were implemented by amending the Medicare Benefits Schedule and relevant determinations, including the Health Insurance (Allied Health Services) Determination 2014.

Name of the measure

10. The title of this initiative is **Telehealth measure to improve access to psychological services for rural and remote patients.**

Implementation date

11. This measure was implemented on 1 November 2017 and changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule took effect from that date.
12. From 1 September 2018, the face-to-face requirements no longer apply and related changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule will take effect from that date.

What are the eligibility requirements of this measure?

13. Services under this measure are available to patients with an assessed mental disorder who would benefit from a structured approach to the management of their treatment needs.
14. The conditions classified as mental disorders for the purposes of these services are informed by the World Health Organisation, 1996, Diagnostic and Management Guidelines for Mental Disorders in Primary Care: ICD-10 Chapter V Primary Care Version.
15. The person receiving care must be located in Monash Modified Model areas 4 - 7.
16. The person receiving care must:
 - a be eligible for Medicare rebates; and
 - b not be admitted to hospital at the time; and
 - c not a patient of an emergency department at the time; and
 - d be located both :
 - i. within a telehealth eligible area at the time of the attendance; and
 - ii. located at least 15 kilometres by road from the eligible allied health provider.

Where can Better Access Telehealth services be provided?

17. The patient must be in Modified Monash Model areas 4-7 at the time of the consultation and at least 15 kilometres apart from the eligible treating allied mental health professional by direct road at the time of consultation.
18. The patient, or their treating allied mental health professional, is not able to travel to a place to meet the 15 kilometres minimum distance requirement.
19. Commonwealth subsidised residents of a residential aged care facility are not able to receive Better Access telehealth services.
20. More information about the Modified Monash Model, including links to a search tool to identify the classification of a specific location, is available at: [Modified Monash Model](#)
21. The treating allied health professional can be located anywhere in Australia, subject to the 15 kilometre minimum distance requirement being met.

Can Better Access telehealth services be provided in hospital?

22. Medicare and DVA rebates are not payable for video consultations with an admitted hospital patient. This applies to both public and private admitted patients and those patients located in emergency departments.

Who is eligible to bill video consultations?

23. Better Access telehealth services can be delivered by eligible allied mental health professionals, specifically, psychologists, and eligible occupational therapists and social workers.
24. All allied mental health professionals wishing to deliver Psychology Therapy Services and Focussed Psychological Strategies (FPS) using Medicare items must be registered with Medicare Australia as meeting the eligibility requirements of the items.
25. A video consultation for allied mental health services for Psychology Therapy Services can be provided by eligible clinical psychologists.
26. A video consultation for FPS can be provided by eligible registered psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists.
27. It is recommended that allied mental health professionals providing FPS services maintain their skills level through continuing professional development (CPD). As of 1 July 2011, providers of FPS services (items 80100 – 80171) are required to have completed ten hours annually of CPD relevant to the provision of FPS to maintain their eligibility to access these items.
28. A series of online one hour FPS CPD modules are available from the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Association of Social Workers and Occupational Therapy Australia websites to assist providers complete their FPS CPD requirements. For more information visit [the Department's website](#).
29. General Practitioners cannot bill for video consultations to prepare or review Mental Health Treatment Plans or deliver GP Focussed Psychological Strategies.

What services can be provided?

30. Better Access services can be provided to offer a full intervention package for the patient's condition. In addition to psycho-education, it is recommended that cognitive behaviour therapy be provided. However, other evidence-based therapies, such as interpersonal therapy, may be used if considered clinically relevant.
31. A range of evidence-based strategies has been approved for use by eligible allied mental health professionals utilising the Better Access FPS Medicare items. There is also flexibility to include narrative therapy for patients of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Further details on Focussed Psychological Strategies are provided on [the Department's website](#).

What services are available under current Better Access arrangements?

32. Under the Better Access initiative, Medicare rebates are available for up to ten individual and ten group allied mental health services per calendar year to patients with an assessed mental disorder who are referred by:
 - A GP managing the patient under a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan or
 - Under a referred psychiatrist assessment and management plan or
 - A psychiatrist or paediatrician.Psychiatrists and paediatricians are able to directly refer patients with mental disorders for Medicare rebatable allied mental health telehealth services.

33. The ten individual services may consist of: GP Focussed Psychological Strategies services (items 2721 to 2727); and/or Medical Practitioner Focussed Psychological Strategies services (items 283 287); and/or Psychological Therapy Services (items 80000 to 80015); and/or Focussed Psychological Strategies – allied mental health services (items 80100 to 80115; 80125 to 80140; 80150 to 80165).
34. The ten group services may consist of: Psychological Therapy Services (items 80020 and 80021); and/or Focussed Psychological Strategies – allied mental health services (items 80120, 80121, 80145, 80146, 80170 and 80171).
35. Referring practitioners may refer patients for a maximum of six Better Access consultations on any one referral. A further referral from a GP or psychiatrist/paediatrician is required for up to four additional sessions to a maximum of ten individual and ten group services per calendar year.

What are the changes introduced through the Telehealth measure to improve access to Better Access services for rural and remote patients?

36. Changes introduced to Medicare enable up to ten annual Better Access mental health consultations to be provided via videoconference by eligible allied mental health professionals.
37. More information about the Telehealth attendance items to be used when claiming for Better Access telehealth consultations is available at the Department of Health [MBS Online website](#).
38. General Practitioners and Medical Practitioners cannot bill for video consultations to prepare or review Mental Health Treatment Plans or deliver GP Focussed Psychological Strategies, but can continue to provide face-to-face services (items 2721 to 2727 and 283 to 287) to their patients.

What is the Medicare schedule fee for a video consultation?

39. Under the Better Access initiative, new items for Telehealth services will be available at the same rebate as the existing ten face-to-face eligible services for allied health providers. More detailed information about the Medicare schedule fee for a video consultation is available at the Department of Health [MBS Online website](#).

What is a video consultation?

40. For the purposes of this initiative, a video consultation is where a patient and an eligible allied health professional undertakes a referred consultation via videoconferencing (i.e. visual and audio link). There must be a visual link between the patient and the eligible allied health professional in order to bill a video consultation and in order for the patient to claim for the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) Telehealth rebates.

What are the technical requirements for a video consultation?

41. The Government is not mandating or endorsing any particular technical solution for telehealth. In providing MBS billed telehealth services, the treating allied health professional should be confident that the technical solution they choose is:
 - capable of providing sufficient video quality for the clinical service being provided; and
 - sufficiently secure to ensure normal privacy requirements for health information are met.
42. The treating allied health professional will need to be confident that the technology used is able to satisfy the item descriptor and that software and hardware used to deliver a

videoconference meets the applicable laws for security and privacy. More information is provided at the MBS online [technology and technical issues page](#).

Further information

Useful links for providers

For further information about Medicare Benefit Schedule items, please go to the Department of Health's website at [MBS Online website](#).

Further information is also available for providers from the Department of Human Services (DHS) provider inquiry line on 132 150

The DHS has developed a Health Practitioner Guideline to substantiate that a valid Allied Mental Health service has been provided by Allied Mental Health professionals which is located on the [DHS website](#).

Information regarding eligibility, claiming and payment processes can be obtained from the Medicare Australia on 132 011 or on the [Medicare website](#).

Useful information may also be available on the following professional association websites:

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au/

Mental Health Professionals Network

<https://www.mhpn.org.au/>

Occupational Therapy Australia

<https://www.otaus.com.au/>

Australian Association of Social workers

<https://www.aasw.asn.au>

Royal Australian College of General Practice

www.racgp.org.au/

Advice about registering with the Department of Human Services to provide Focused Psychological Strategies - allied mental health services using items 80100-80171 inclusive is available from the Department of Human Services provider inquiry line on 132 150.

Useful link for patients and carers

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba-fact-pat>

Useful link for allied health professionals

Information about telehealth services can be located on the [Australian Psychological Society website](#) including information for consumers, GP referrers and also for providers.