

# Introduction to Telehealth

## What is Telehealth?

As the healthcare industry deals with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, general practices have adapted new models of care delivery to ensure safety of patients and their practice teams. The majority of general practices have embraced the use of Telehealth to provide consultations especially in remote and rural areas.

Telehealth services use information and communication technologies to deliver healthcare services and transmit health information. This can include services rendered via telephone consultation and/or videoconferencing. It has the potential to provide patients with more convenient and efficient access to healthcare.

This guide will focus on teleconferencing and HealthDirect's video conferencing platform. Capital Health Network has partnered with HealthDirect to provide the Video Call platform free to practices within the ACT. HealthDirect Video Call is a free, easy to use, trusted and reliable telehealth option for health professionals to conduct video consultations. It provides a single, consistent entry point on the health services' webpage for all their patients and, unlike traditional video conferencing, patients do not need an account, special software, or dial-in details. This reduces the need for extra resources or systems to support video consulting.

## Why does Telehealth matter?

Telehealth offers easy access to health services and convenience especially when patients cannot travel or need to isolate at home. It is a supplemental aid that can improve health care access and can be used in conjunction with face-to-face consultation. The Department of Health has made the temporary MBS items available for Telehealth consultations to help reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to the community and provide protection to patients and healthcare providers.

## How does Telehealth benefit me and my practice?

Telehealth can have many benefits which can affect your practice and your patients:

- Expand access to healthcare and reach more patients.
- May reduce patient "no-shows."
- May improve service delivery and flexibility – GPs can provide consultations from any location that has decent internet connection.
- May increase practice revenue because Telehealth may be less time-consuming. GPs can use the extra time to see other patients.
- Can improve patient satisfaction because of the convenience Telehealth provides.

# Telehealth General Practice Checklist

To enable telehealth consultations for your patients.

☐ **Have a plan.**

Set up a meeting with your team and plan how to deliver Telehealth to your patients whether via telephone or video consultation. Establish policies and systems on how you will integrate this into your daily workflow. This is also the time for your GPs to check with their professional indemnity insurer about Telehealth consultations.

☐ **Technical, hardware and internet connection considerations.**

For telephone consultations all that is required is a telephone. If you wish to utilise video-call technology for your consults, you will need to ensure you have video equipment and a fast, secure, and reliable internet connection. Most laptops and tablet devices come with cameras in-built, but a simple webcam will be needed for any PC without a camera. Most webcams come with a microphone built in. You may also like to use a headset for more privacy and better audio quality.

☐ **Setup the consultation room.**

Ensure that you have an appropriate workspace. Ensure the room has good lighting, sound quality, and can provide patient privacy.

☐ **Organise training for your clinicians and staff.**

Contact HealthDirect and arrange for a training session for your GPs and staff. Also ask for additional resources to prepare your practice for video consultations.

☐ **Be familiar with the temporary MBS item numbers for Telehealth.**

All Medicare eligible Australians can be bulk-billed for Telehealth. Your GPs should be familiar with the various Telehealth services that can be claimed through Medicare.

☐ **Support and troubleshooting.**

Provide guides to your patients explaining how to use HealthDirect Video Call. Have HealthDirect's phone number handy in case something goes wrong during a video consultation and have a plan B in case there is a technical issue.

☐ **Conduct a test call.**

Before you go live, conduct a test video call to assess and fix any issues that may come up.

☐ **Implement Telehealth and seek feedback from patients.**

Implement Telehealth and seek feedback from your GPs and patients to see if there are any areas for improvement.

For ongoing support and education, please visit the HealthDirect website, or contact the Capital Health Network's Quality Improvement Team ([primarycare@chnact.org.au](mailto:primarycare@chnact.org.au)).

**Websites to visit:**

Australian Digital Health Agency

HealthDirect Video Call Resource Centre

HealthPathways Telehealth

MBS Telehealth Item Numbers

RACGP Telehealth Guide for GPs