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TEMPORARY TELEHEALTH EXTENSION WILL HELP PATIENTS

Today’s announcement that the temporary Medicare rebates for COVID-19 telehealth consultations will be extended for a further six months will help patients and medical practices during the global health pandemic, the AMA said today.

The AMA proposed the introduction of telehealth items earlier this year as part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle COVID-19, and has worked behind the scenes for them to be extended beyond their original 30 September expiry date.

“With Australia still in the midst of a global pandemic, it is essential for telehealth to be continued as part of efforts to contain the spread of the virus,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

“These telehealth items have supported the provision of care during these very difficult times, and have been embraced by patients and doctors alike.

“The AMA wants to see telehealth become a permanent part of the health system, and this has been backed by the Select Committee on Financial Technology and Regulatory Technology.

“Today’s announcement means that medical practices can now start planning appointments beyond the end of this month, knowing that these items remain in place.

“The decision to allow GPs to apply their usual fee schedule to telehealth services from 1 October is also welcome. GPs have a long history of looking after patients in difficult financial circumstances and this decision will not change that approach.

“The AMA remains concerned about the viability of practices in lockdown situations and has urged the Government to step in with more support if needed to help them maintain services to patients.

“During the pandemic, we are also seeing patients ignore their own health needs. While COVID-19 is a serious illness, failing to see a doctor or have tests done may have far worse health ramifications.

“Medical practices have implemented strict procedures to minimise risks of COVID-19 and patients can be confident that a visit to see their doctor is very safe. For those conditions that don’t require a face to face visit, telehealth is a quality alternative.

“The AMA remains in discussions with the Federal Government about the long-term future of Medicare-funded telehealth. Telehealth is working very well and, now that we have this extension in place, we have time to finalise the future of telehealth in Australia.”

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