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PERMANENT TELEHEALTH BRINGS MEDICARE INTO 21ST CENTURY SAYS AMA

The AMA says the health of all Australians will benefit from the availability of telehealth, which the Government has today announced will be permanently funded through Medicare.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said just over a year ago the AMA was pleased to stand alongside Health Minister Greg Hunt, when he committed to make Medicare-funded telehealth a permanent part of the health system, something the AMA had been lobbying for over many years.

“Today’s announcement is very welcome news. Ongoing telehealth has been locked into our health care system for both GP and non-GP specialist services. This will ensure Australia’s healthcare system continues to be one of the most equitable and effective systems around the world,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen temporary MBS arrangements put in place to support patients to access medical care via the telephone and video.

“These arrangements have been embraced by both doctors and patients, with telehealth giving people access to care while reducing community transmission of the virus.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is still not over, and telehealth will now be able to continue to play a significant role in keeping the community safe, particularly in outbreak situations. It will protect the vulnerable members of the community and help ensure practices can stay open, servicing the community.

“We know just how critical it is to ensure practices can remain open during the pandemic and telehealth, combined with adequate provision of personal protective equipment to medical practices are key to continuing to provide services for patients.”

Dr Khorshid said telehealth also improved access to healthcare for people who found it difficult to take time off work; could not leave children or people they were caring for and who live out of town and away from their GP or non-GP specialist.

“A face-to-face visit to a doctor will still remain an essential part of our health system. However, Medicare was established in 1984 well before people had access to mobile phones or video conferencing and expanding access to telehealth is an overdue reform, which brings Medicare into the 21st century,” Dr Khorshid said.

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