

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

39 Brisbane Avenue, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



Government failure on telehealth services puts vulnerable patients at risk

The Federal Government has failed an early test of its pandemic response by refusing to extend COVID-19 telehealth services despite the ongoing challenges to our health system, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) says.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said the refusal of the Government to extend Medicare-funded COVID-19 telehealth services from 1 July would limit vulnerable patients’ telephone access to doctors.

“This decision means telephone access to doctors will be significantly limited and this will hit vulnerable patients hardest, including those who do not have access to high bandwidth internet and those who can’t operate the necessary IT systems,” he said.

“This means that older patients, those with chronic health conditions including cancers and those who are immune suppressed will have less access to care from tomorrow and may be put at increased risk of contracting COVID if they now have to attend their doctors appointment face to face.

“Each day thousands of Australians are required to self-isolate because of a COVID-19 infection and as a close contact. Many of these people will not be able to continue to access medical care when they need it.”

Dr Khorshid said tens of thousands of COVID-19 cases were reported each day, thousands of people were in hospital and a tragic number of deaths were reported each day. The emergence of new sub-variants of Omicron were likely to drive case numbers higher.

“Broad access to Medicare-funded telehealth has played a critical part in the pandemic response, reducing exposure to the virus and supporting people in self-isolation to be able to access critical medical care.

"The Labor Party criticised the former government’s pandemic response over the past two years and in not extending access to COVID telehealth settings it must now face the same criticism.

“Although the Government has acknowledged the need for ongoing support of the hospital sector with an extension of COVID-19 hospital funding, it has failed to take a consistent approach when it comes to patients accessing care from their GP or specialist.

“We understand the Government has had to make a lot of decisions in a very short timeframe since it won the election. It appears to the AMA that this decision has been rushed and the AMA will work to encourage the Government to rethink its approach and put our most vulnerable patients first.”

30th June 2022

CONTACT: AMA Media: +61 2 6270 5478
 +61 427 209 753
media@ama.com.au

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: http://twitter.com/ama_media
 Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>
 Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>