

AMA welcomes new telehealth item but more to be done

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The Australian Medical Association today welcomed the federal government's decision to implement a new telehealth item for COVID anti-viral management and to reinstate pandemic leave but says much more is needed to avoid negative health outcomes in the current COVID wave.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said while the new telehealth item was welcome there were many other telephone Medicare items dropped by the Government on 1 July which had left vulnerable people at risk.

"It is pleasing to see that the government is listening to medical and community concerns regarding these important COVID related measures. However, today's decisions don't address the needs of vulnerable Australians with other medical needs, who need access to longer consultations by telephone during this surging COVID pandemic," Dr Khorshid said.

"Vulnerable patients, including those who do not have access to high bandwidth internet and those who can't operate the necessary IT systems, are hit hardest by having the telephone items removed. These are exactly the people who we don't want to be unnecessarily sitting in doctors' waiting rooms.

"The AMA met with the Minister for Health, Mark Butler yesterday and we made it very clear that full access to telephone telehealth is critical during the pandemic and is a very reasonable way to conduct many medical consultations even outside a pandemic.

"We will continue to push the minister and the government to reinstate the very reasonable COVID settings for telehealth until they are no longer needed. We also agreed with the minister to continue discussions around the long-term place for telehealth in our health system.

"Government needs to make sure it is listening to the voices of people who know about the crisis in our health system – patients, doctors, nurses and their families.

“Telehealth has become a critical tool to help us cope with this crisis and the attitude of bureaucrats and bean counters to telehealth has to be balanced with the lived experience of Australians and health care workers.

“Those most affected by the telehealth cuts include rural communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people, people with disabilities and mental health concerns, many of whom already have poorer health outcomes than the general population.”

Media Contacts

 02 6270 5478  0427 209 753  media@ama.com.au
