

## Media Alert



### MEDIA RELEASE

## **Federal Government commitment to bulk billed telehealth psychiatry consultations a step forward for rural and regional Australia**

**17 October 2022**

The Federal Government's announcement today that it is restoring bulk billed telehealth psychiatry consultations for Australians living outside metro areas is a promising first step towards improving the accessibility and affordability of mental health services for all Australians, the peak body for psychiatrists in Australia says.

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) President, Associate Professor Vinay Lakra, said the Federal Government's reinstatement of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Item 288, as promised before the election, should be seen as the beginning of wider reform to provide affordable access to psychiatry.

"The removal of bulk-billed telehealth compounded existing economic inequities by burdening patients with unaffordable gap-fees and out-of-pocket costs and while affordability is still a major issue across the board, this reinstatement is a step in the right direction," Associate Professor Lakra said.

"The RANZCP has been very vocal about the need for the Federal Government to address access to mental health services broadly and reinstating the bulk-billing arrangements for those living in regional and rural Australia is one of the measures that will make a difference.

Associate Professor Lakra said the RANZCP has been advocating for a number of measures to address systemic issues in the mental health system and deliver affordable access to a psychiatrist for those facing both geographic and socioeconomic disadvantage.

Among the measures being advocated for by the RANZCP include the reinstatement of multiple MBS items for telephone-based consultations. Their expiry on 1 July 2022 has deprived those unable to afford a full-cost treatment access to a longer consultation with a psychiatrist.

"There remain serious gaps to affordable mental health care access across both rural and metropolitan areas. Every Australian should be able to access the support they need for their mental health and wellbeing.

"The RANZCP looks forward to working with the Federal Government to ensure further measures are put in place to expand bulk-billing arrangements for all Australians who face financial disadvantage.

"It's never been more important that we make accessing mental health support as affordable and accessible as possible to everyone, regardless of how much they earn or where they live".

For all other expert mental health information visit [Your Health in Mind](#), the RANZCP's consumer health information website.

**ENQUIRIES:** For media enquiries or to arrange an interview contact 0437 315 911.

**The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists** is a membership organisation that prepares medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments and other groups on mental health care. For information about our work, our members or our history, visit [www.ranzcp.org](http://www.ranzcp.org).

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