

Practice Connect

Latest news and updates

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See Your GP – communication tools to reassure your patients

WA Primary Health Alliance recognises that WA's general practices are experiencing business and financial pressures due to a range of issues, and that due to COVID-19, many have been quieter than usual.

For some, there is concern that patients may be neglecting their regular medical care or not attending for appointments that are necessary for screening, prescriptions or immunisations.

To help GPs and patients, WA Primary Health Alliance has launched **See Your GP**, a campaign to remind people of the importance of regular medical appointments and reassure them of the availability of safe, essential health care at this time.

How can you help?

Your general practice can assist in our campaign by sharing the social posts, videos and flyer [available here](#) on your communication channels such as social media, newsletters, SMS reminders, online booking page or website.



WAPHA: Free general practice wellness program

WA Primary Health Alliance is offering FREE counselling support for all GPs and their practice staff across WA through the long established and experienced employee assistance program provider, AccessEAP.

To support WA general practice teams navigate the COVID-19 response, and to help you deal with the pressures that arise professionally and personally, WA-based general practices can now access WA Primary Health Alliance's General Practice Wellness Program.

General practice staff, as Members of WA Primary Health Alliance are offered three confidential counselling sessions free of charge.

More information is provided in the [attached brochure](#).



You can use your sessions for a range of matters such as:

- Preparing for major life changes
- Changes in your role at work
- Changes within your family (marriage, new baby, divorce/separation)
- Goal setting for your professional or personal life
- Developing new strategies for handling stress at work or at home
- Or simply to have someone to speak to about any of life's inevitable challenges

When you call to access the service, you **must** identify as a Member of WA Primary Health Alliance.

To book a phone or video counselling appointment, you can call AccessEAP anytime on 1800 818 728.

GPs and practice staff can also contact Practice Assist on 1800 227 747 with any questions about the program.

AHPRA Telehealth guidance for practitioners

Registered health practitioners are playing a vital role in treating and containing the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. This is an unprecedented situation that practitioners are working hard at to keep people safe in a demanding and fast-changing environment.

AHPRA and the National Boards have developed the [Telehealth guidance for practitioners](#) information source which outlines expectations of how registered health practitioners will use telehealth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While practitioners may decide to use telehealth for a range of reasons, the Australian Government has recently introduced new temporary Medicare Benefit Scheme (MBS) telehealth items. Information about these new temporary telehealth items can be found on the [MBS website](#), or by visiting the [Practice Assist Telehealth Information](#) page to review further resources.

Please click [here](#) to access the full guide [Telehealth guidance for practitioners](#).

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PIP QI Update

A reminder to all practices participating in the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) Quality Improvement (QI) incentive that quarter 4 commenced on 1 May 2020. To be eligible for this quarter, practices must undertake continuous quality improvement and share data with WAPHA at least once each quarter or hold a valid exemption from the Australian Department of Health. The PIP QI incentive has also increased for this quarter to support the provision of face-to-face care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Practices that open for face-to-face services for a minimum of four hours a day (or for part time practices, an average of 50% of their normal practice opening hours) will have their **next PIP QI payment doubled**.

If your practice is interested in participating in PIP QI, you can find further information about the program [here](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please visit the [PIP FAQ page](#), or speak to your Primary Health Liaison or Comprehensive Primary Care Facilitator.

PenCS Cat Recipes for COVID-19

For practices that have access to the CAT Plus suite of data extraction tools, there are new recipes available to help you to identify patients at risk of COVID-19. This can help your practice to understand how many of your patients are at greater risk of COVID-19 and can help you to provide more targeted support to these patients.

This fortnight, we are featuring the recipe to identify [Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander patients with two or more chronic diseases](#). This recipe will enable you to create a list of patients that identify a Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander who have two or more chronic conditions. You can then use this list to recall patients for routine chronic disease care, a free flu vaccination, or to advise that telehealth appointments are available. To help ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients with chronic disease continue to receive the care they need during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a number of temporary telehealth and phone MBS items available for GPs, practice nurses and allied health for Aboriginal health and chronic disease management. More information on these items is available [here](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that practices continue to ask patients if they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander because they are at most risk of COVID-19. The WA Department of Health provides information [about identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients](#). On the Practice Assist [COVID-19 Resources page](#), you will find a range of helpful resources including a [GP Factsheet and Checklist](#) to support the care of your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients during COVID-19.

All of the recipes available from PenCS, including the COVID-19 recipes, are available on the [PenCS website](#).

If you need help, please do not hesitate to contact our Practice Assist helpdesk on 1800 227 747 or practiceassist@wapha.org.au, or your Primary Health Liaison or CPC Facilitator.



Department of Health: PIP and WIP – updated COVID-19 Business Continuity Arrangements

In recognition that general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations across the nation have been impacted by COVID-19, the Department of Health and Services Australia have undertaken work to implement a number of temporary measures under the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) and Workforce Incentive Program (WIP) to help ensure business continuity.

These measures are designed to make it easier for practices to continue to manage the impact of COVID-19 and to continue providing quality care to their communities.

For further information please review the [PIP and WIP – updated COVID-19 Business Continuity Arrangements](#) from the Department of Health, and for further resources and frequently asked questions please visit the [Practice Assist: COVID-19 Practice Management](#) webpage.

GP Advice: Flud Quad 2020 Influenza Vaccine Update

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) and the WA Faculty of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) have represented WA GPs in discussions with WA Health and the Communicable Disease Control Directorate (CDCD) to address the issues experienced by general practices in acquiring and maintaining sufficient supply of the 2020 influenza vaccine for patients aged 65 years or over.

Following concerns raised by practices with WAPHA and the RACGP as to the inability to acquire adequate vaccine supply, WAPHA comprehensively surveyed general practices across the State to assess the situation. Overwhelmingly, the response was that practices are experiencing great difficulty in getting the stock they need to meet patient demand in the current (and unique) environment of COVID-19.

Significant progress has been made to ensure the current situation is well understood and systems put in place to improve current and future supply, including:

- To counteract misinformation in the public arena regarding general practice closures and preferencing of Pharmacy providers over general practice, CDCD will regularly brief the Minister for Health that over 98% of WA general practices continue to undertake influenza vaccine administration, prioritising vulnerable population groups and running dedicated and proactive flu vaccination clinics.
- Highlighting the disconnect between Australian Immunisation Register (matching supply and usage) and the experience of general practice in administering the 2020 influenza immunisation program for patients aged 65 and over.
- A systematic approach to the sharing of extra stock among practices, supported by the CDCD.
- Agreement on the equitable distribution of the remaining 20,000 doses of Flud Quad available to CDCD, to meet the needs of your patients aged 65 and over.
- Agreement on early discussions between WAPHA, the RACGP and CDCD to resolve quantity and continuity of supply for the 2021 influenza season and beyond.

WAPHA and the RACGP WA strongly encourage you to [download the full details of this important agreement](#) here and share with your practice staff to ensure you can be confident of a timely and appropriate supply of vaccines for your patients.

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Medicare changes to support the medical workforce

To support doctors responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Health is implementing a number of short-term measures to waive or streamline Medicare program requirements.

These will ensure eligible doctors can continue to satisfy their obligations under section 19AA and 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* and provide Medicare services to patients in their current practice. These changes apply to the:

- Special Approved Placements Program (SAPP)
- Approved Medical Deputising Services (AMDS)
- More Doctors for Rural Australia Program (MDRAP)
- Rural Locum Relief Program (RLRP)
- RACGP Practice Experience Program (PEP)
- ACRRM Independent Pathway

The Department of Health will provide eligible doctors a six-month extension to workforce program placements (3GA placements) expiring from 1 May 2020 and will continue these extensions on a month-by-month basis while the COVID-19 pandemic remains. This extension will be applied automatically, and eligible doctors will receive a confirmation letter from Services Australia to confirm the extension.

There are some conditions attached to these changes - read the [Summary of Changes](#) and [Q&A document](#) for more information.

GP-led respiratory clinic opened in Halls Head

WA's third Commonwealth endorsed GP-led respiratory opened, at 1 Elderberry Circle, Halls Head, in a stand-alone facility which is operated by Modern Medical Clinics. Opening hours will vary depending upon demand between Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm.

The clinic will operate strictly by appointment only. People can book online at HotDoc and search for Halls Head Respiratory Clinic, or they can call the clinic on 9582 7638.

This will allow people with a mild illness suggestive of coronavirus, such as an upper respiratory tract infection, to be assessed and, if required, tested for COVID-19.

In addition to the new clinic, people can continue to visit one of the metropolitan based COVID clinics or request a referral for a test from their usual GP.

Child Development Services during the COVID-19 pandemic: information for referrers

In response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Metropolitan Child Development Service (CDS) is moving to the provision of telehealth appointments where appropriate. Some face to face appointments may still be offered. CDS continues to accept new referrals and will continue to provide all services.

They will continue to receive and process referrals as usual during this time. Information on how to make a referral to CDS can be found [here](#).

RACGP COVIDSafe Fact Sheet

The RACGP have developed a COVIDSafe Fact Sheet, to help Australians understand why the COVID-Safe application is safe, how it works and what people need to do to play their part in combating COVID-19.

You can download the fact sheet [here](#), to provide to patients.

Latest GP Update on COVID-19 from the Deputy Chief Medical Officer

The latest newsletter includes updates on:

- COVID-19 testing expansion
- COVIDSafe app launches
- Update on GP-led respiratory clinics roll-out
- Guidance for symptom monitoring in health and aged care workers
- Remote point of care testing program commences
- Update on Breast Screening services

Read the latest edition [here](#), and or subscribe to future editions [here](#).

Nominations: WA Primary Health Alliance Councils and Committees

WA Primary Health Alliance is supported by a governance structure of councils and committees as we look system-wide at gaps, identifying ways to improve important primary care services and encourage innovation in the delivery of care.

The councils and committees have a core purpose to support health care integration, strengthen collaboration and increase transparency. They assist us in progressing our **key priorities** and help us listen to local communities to understand who they are, their unique health needs, and the ways in which their world is changing.

Clinical Committees in each of the seven country regions, and Clinical Councils in metropolitan Perth, have membership from health professionals, allied health practitioners, medical administrators, hospital executives and clinicians from all areas of primary care.

Nominations

Are you ready to use your knowledge, experience and networks to support healthcare integration in your region? Nominations will open this Friday **8 May** and close 17:00 on 8 June 2020.

For further information please click on the [‘Nominate Here Button’](#).



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Allocation of surgical masks from the National Medical Stockpile

For mask requests, visit the [Practice Assist website](#).

Please note, re-orders will not be accepted within five business days (Mon-Fri) of the previous request, except in exceptional circumstances.

Please send all general queries in relation to the National Medical Stockpile to Stockpile.Ops@health.gov.au.

What is ePrescribing?

Electronic prescribing is when a prescriber generates a script electronically in their clinical system, and then securely transmits it to a prescription delivery service so it can be accessed by the pharmacist's dispensing system.

Although the basic technology and infrastructure for the process has existed for a few years, there was still a legal requirement (under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) for a hardcopy script to be printed, before the medicine could be supplied. This legislation was updated by the Australian Commonwealth government on 31 October 2019, paving the way for implementation of ePrescribing nationally.

Benefits:

- Improved patient safety – reduced risk of transcription errors.
- Workflow benefits – prescribers will no longer need to print and sign prescriptions.
- Increased convenience and flexibility for patients.
- Supports [telehealth consultations](#) and potentially other digital health initiatives.
- Reduced medication misuse through increased data available for real-time monitoring of prescriptions.

To find out further information about how ePrescribing will work for your practice and set up requirements please visit the [HealthVital IT](#) website, or visit the '[Electronic Prescribing – For Prescribers](#)' Australian Digital Health Agency webpage.

Digital CRC Telehealth Hub resources for both clinicians and consumers

The Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre (DHCRC) has launched a new website, [the Telehealth Hub](#), which will help clinicians, health professionals and health consumers to access and deliver telehealth services in Australia more effectively.

This website collates and indexes a wide range of resources that have been shared and recommended by members of Australia's health community. Visit the Digital Health CRC [Telehealth website page here](#).

The Australian Immunisation Handbook is now available as a mobile application (App)

The Australian Immunisation Handbook is now available as a mobile application known as the Australian Immunisation Handbook App.

All content available via the Australian Government Department of Health Australian Immunisation Handbook website (the Handbook) is accessible on mobile devices (such as smart phones or tablets).

This enables access to the Australian Immunisation Handbook content - even when there is no access to the Internet.

Details and links to download the App are available on the [Department of Health Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) website.

Vaccination recommendations for pregnant women

In response to a recent increase in enquiries related to vaccinations during pregnancy, NCIRS has prepared a summary of the vaccination recommendations for pregnant women.

Pregnant women are strongly recommended to receive a single dose of pertussis vaccine and a single dose of influenza vaccine in each pregnancy, irrespective of the interval between pregnancies.

The FAQ is available [here](#). Further information on the WA Influenza immunisation program can be found [here](#) on the WA Department of Health dedicated webpage.

The Pilbara Health Professionals Network (PHPN) is now live!

The aim of the PHPN is to provide rural and remote health professionals in the Pilbara with better support and greater opportunities to network, upskill, share information and collaborate in a local supportive community environment.

An online launch event was held for the network in April, with attendees tuning in from their homes and offices to learn about the PHPN and enjoy a live-stream performance by Pilbara singer-songwriter Greg Gardiner.

Membership to the PHPN is free and is open to health professionals and those working in the health field in the Pilbara region. Please visit the [website and join the network today!](#)



PILBARA
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NETWORK



COVID-19 telehealth pathway now available on HealthPathways

The **COVID-19 Telehealth** pathway has recently been published and contains the following:

- Guidance and information to assist health professionals in setting up and delivering effective and safe telehealth services.
- Tips on how telehealth differs from face to face consultations.
- A summary of the temporary changes to legislation as it relates to delivery of telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes post consultation workflows such as pathology and radiology requests as well as medical certificates.
- Direct links to MBS online telehealth billing information and other useful resources.

COVID-19 HealthPathways Updates

The following content updates have now been published on the following pathways:

- **Diagnosing Diabetes in Children and Adolescents**, this pathway is newly published and includes the following information about COVID-19:
 - A COVID-19 note about a reduction in the diagnosis of new-onset type 1 diabetes during the COVID-19 pandemic and that there may be a delay in presentation to both hospitals and primary care. Health professionals are encouraged to be alert to this possibility during telehealth consultations.
- **COVID-19 Assessment and Management**
 - A definition of respiratory droplets and contact transmission has been added.
 - An update to recommended infection control, including the appropriate and rational use of PPE, including links to on how to correctly put on and remove PPE.
 - Inclusion of advice for patients to continue taking their regular medications.
- **Mental Health Act**
 - An alert has been added which includes information relating to telehealth options and a link to the WA Department of Health - Mental Health Infection Control Directions.
- **Cervical Screening**
 - A COVID-19 note has been added to encourage health professionals to continue cervical screening and follow-up during the outbreak as per advice from the National Cervical Screening Program.
- **Family and Domestic Violence**
 - A COVID-19 note has been added to highlight that women's refuges and family and domestic violence support services are essential services and will remain open during the outbreak.
- **Gestational Diabetes**
 - A COVID-19 note has been added linking to King Edward Memorial Hospitals new guidelines on diagnostic testing for gestational diabetes mellitus during pregnancy.
- A COVID-19 note has been added to numerous **Respiratory pathways**, highlighting peak bodies recommendations on lung function testing and to use metered dose inhalers in preference to nebulisers where possible.

Please email healthpathways@wapha.org.au for login details if you do not already have access to HealthPathways.

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NPS MedicineWise: Virtual visits – good news story



NPS MedicineWise are delivering free independent educational visits via video call to ensure that health professionals can continue to access educational activities without a face-to-face appointment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since mid-March, when NPS MedicineWise started switching educational visits away from an in-practice service, virtual visits have increased almost 5-fold nationally. Largely this has meant that General Practitioners have been able to continue their focus on quality, by accessing free accredited CPD in the most convenient manner.

A range of video call platforms can be used for virtual visits, and visits can be scheduled at a mutually convenient time, including before or after standard work hours. Virtual visits are approved activities under both the RACGP and ACRRM CPD programs. Virtual visits are currently available on two topics:

- **Paediatric asthma: breathing new life into diagnosis and management** – focuses on the differences between preschool and school-age children when diagnosing and managing asthma, and how treatment of children’s asthma differs from that of adults.
- **Opioids, chronic pain and the bigger picture** – provides clarity on the role of opioids when supporting patients with chronic non-cancer pain.

Health professionals can [schedule a virtual visit online](#), via the NPS MedicineWise website health professional education page, or directly through their local Educational Visitor.

For practices who participate in MedicineInsight, data will be presented in a practice report and used to customise the visit, providing richer insights into the topic and evidence. Non-participating practices will receive insights drawn from aggregated MedicineInsight clinical data.

How NPS MedicineWise virtual educational visits work



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BreastScreen WA has resumed metropolitan screening services

BreastScreen WA – the state’s breast screening program – resumed mammogram screening services at metropolitan clinics on Wednesday 29 April 2020.

Screening in rural areas will recommence as soon as logistically possible.

Clients who have recently been invited to have a screening mammogram are encouraged to contact BreastScreen WA on 13 20 50 or visit the online booking webpage to book their appointment.

For more information please visit the BSWA website www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au

You can also visit the [Breast Imaging Screening HealthPathway](#), which has details on the locations and availability of the BreastScreen WA clinics.

Diabetes management during COVID-19: The Lancet

Diabetes is one of the most important comorbidities linked to the severity of all three known human pathogenic coronavirus infections, including severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. Read more in The Lancet [here](#).

Lung Health Awareness Month - help us support the community this winter season

There are around 7 million Australians living with a lung disease or lung cancer who are at risk of a severe and potentially fatal case if they contract COVID-19.

As you know, winter is already a dangerous time for people living with lung disease as they are more likely to experience a flare-up of their symptoms.

To provide support through this challenging time, Lung Foundation Australia has created a winter campaign - **Know, Plan, Protect, Connect** – which is launching in May to mark Lung Health Awareness Month.

A second stream of the campaign will focus on raising awareness of the symptoms of lung disease among the broader community by encouraging people to complete the [lung health checklist](#).

We have prepared promotional pack including social media tiles and posts, a newsletter piece, campaign poster and downloadable resource for you to share with your networks. If you could include these in your newsletters and social media, it would be greatly appreciated. To download the pack, [click here](#).

For further information please visit the [Lung Foundation Australia](#) website.

Webinars and online training

Visit our Webinars & Workshops page at www.practiceassist.com.au for the events calendar.

Webinars

Healthdirect Video Call Familiarisation Webinars

Presented by Healthdirect

Multiple dates starting Wednesday 22 April

[View a recorded session here](#)

Sustaining business viability and keeping the doors open during the pandemic

Presented by WAPHA and Brentnalls

Thursday 7 May

Virtual Community of Practice: Mental health impacts of pandemic experience

Presented by Dr David Oldham, Professor Nick

Titov, Dr Sarah Youngson and Dr Richard

Choong

Thursday 7 May

An update on cardiovascular and COVID-19

Presented by RACGP in partnership with Heart Foundation WA

Saturday 9 May

ACRRM and RDAA webinar: COVID-19 and Palliative Care

Presented by ACRRM and RDAA

Tuesday 12 May

Online Training

COVID-19 Infection Control Training

Presented by Department of Health

An introduction to telephone triage

Presented by APNA