Using Telehealth
in general practice

What is Telehealth?

Telehealth, or Virtual Care, involves using video or telephone (audio-only) to provide health services including triage, diagnosis, treatment and preventive health. Services that can be provided via telehealth include:

- Routine and acute care appointments
- Chronic condition management and health assessments
- Mental health services
- Sexual and reproductive health consultations
- Pregnancy support counselling
- Case conferencing

Why use Telehealth?

While not intended to replace necessary visits to healthcare services, telehealth can provide a safe and convenient alternative to face-to-face healthcare delivery, increasing patient access to their usual GP and GP-coordinated multidisciplinary teams, as well as for urgent or specialised services such as mental and sexual reproductive health consultations.

Compared to telephone (audio-only), video conferencing can provide more information to aid diagnosis and management, including non-verbal and visual cues. Video consults can also be more effective for patient engagement.

Benefits for General Practice

- Increased provider flexibility and higher patient reach by reducing time- and travel-related barriers
- More cost-effective service delivery through improved clinical workflows and increased practice efficiency
- Increased collaboration, networking, and case conferencing opportunities with other service providers
- Improved coordination of care and service integration
- Service delivery growth opportunities
- Reduced patient 'no-shows'
- Reduced risk of infectious disease transmission to healthcare providers and community members

Benefits for Patients

- Improved access to healthcare, improving equity of access to services
- Reduced travel, expense, and time away from home
- Reduced waiting times supporting faster diagnosis and appropriate treatment
- Improved continuity and quality of care
- Increased opportunity to contact their healthcare provider between face-to-face consults

Example scenario of telehealth in a general practice

Jordan attends the practice regularly for management of their chronic health conditions. A recent exacerbation of their condition prompted Jordan to book a long appointment with their GP today for a review. Their symptoms prevent them from getting to the practice independently today and their daughter whom they would usually rely on for transport is unable to take today off work.

General Practice **with** video Telehealth	General Practice **without** video Telehealth
A video consult is set up to replace the face-to-face visit.	The appointment is rescheduled for a different day.
Potential outcomes: • Improved access and continuity of care • Timely decision-making, referral and prescribing • Jordan's daughter can join the call from their own device, with Jordan's consent, to stay informed of their care	Potential outcomes: • Delayed decision making • Delayed care • Avoidable deterioration that may require presentation to urgent care services • Cancelling the face-to-face appointment may lead to a gap in the GP's clinic that might not be filled
Patient experience: • Jordan was able to access the GP from the convenience of their home and receive appropriate and timely care for their changing health needs. • Jordan's daughter also benefited from not having to take time off work to travel for the appointment.	Patient experience: • Jordan is anxious about how to manage their condition as they wait for the next appointment

Resources

Acronyms			
ADHA:	Australian Digital Health Agency	**MBS:**	Medicare Benefits Schedule
AHPA:	Allied Health Professionals Association	**OAIC:**	Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
AMA:	Australian Medical Association	**RACGP:**	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Implementation support	
Checklists and overviews:	• Becoming telehealth enabled checklist | Practice Assist • Guide to providing telephone and video consultations in general practice | RACGP Guidance, flowcharts and practice tips • Quick guides for telehealth | Centre for Online Health
Equipment and setup:	**Selecting and setting up video conferencing software** • Telehealth Service Options | Practice Assist **Check internet connection** • Speed test
Access:	For information about individual user access contact your preferred telehealth vendor.
Compliance:	**Security and Privacy** • Guide to securing personal information | OAIC • Privacy checklist for telehealth services | MBS **Medicare Benefits Schedule** • Telehealth services | MBS • Assignment of benefit for telehealth services | Services Australia **Policy and workflow development** • 10 minimum standards for telemedicine | AMA
Learning:	• Telehealth | Clinician Assist WA (individual login required) • Online Learning Portal | ADHA Self-paced module on securely using online conferencing • Telehealth Quality Improvement | Practice Assist • Telehealth skills ECHO | Centre for Online Health Virtual peer network with monthly case-based learning sessions