



Telehealth Services Provided by GPs and Non-Specialist Medical Practitioners to Patients in Rural and Remote Areas

Last updated: 2 October 2019

- This change is effective from 1 November 2019.
- A factsheet summarising what the change is, why the change has been made, how it will affect stakeholders and what they need to do is available on MBS Online at [Factsheet – GP Telehealth Items in MMM 6 and 7](#).
- More information about the change is provided below, in response to frequently asked questions. If you cannot find the information you need, please contact the Department of Health at askMBS@health.gov.au.
- To subscribe to future MBS Online updates, visit www.mbsonline.gov.au and click 'Subscribe'.

Why are the changes being made?

From 1 November 2019, new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items will be introduced to allow general practitioners (GPs) and non-specialist medical practitioners to provide services by videoconference to patients living in rural and remote areas.

Access to timely primary care services can be difficult in rural and remote Australia.

Flexible service delivery models, including the telehealth/videoconference model of healthcare delivery, help to address inequities in the provision of health care services and have the potential to deliver improved health outcomes to people living in rural and remote locations.

How have these changes been communicated to stakeholders?

Prior to the 1 November 2019 listing, the Department circulated communication materials (including factsheets about the changes) to relevant professional groups in October 2019 and encouraged dissemination of these materials to other members and fellows. Information was also made available through the MBS website (www.mbsonline.gov.au).

Question: Who is eligible for the new telehealth service?

To be eligible for the new telehealth service, a patient will:

- be living in a Modified Monash Model (MMM) 6 or 7 area;
- have received three face-to-face professional attendances in the preceding twelve months from the practitioner who will provide the telehealth service; and
- at the time of the consultation, be at least 15 kilometres by road from the practitioner.



The MMM classification status of specific locations can be checked at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator/health-workforce-locator>

Question: What are the clinical requirements of the new telehealth items?

The new telehealth items will replicate the clinical requirements and MBS rebates of the current time-tiered general attendance items in consulting rooms used by GPs and non-specialist medical practitioners (refer table below).

Telehealth Items and Replicated Standard Consultation Items

Practitioner Type	New Telehealth Item	Replicated Consultation Item
General Practitioner	2461	3
	2463	23
	2464	36
	2465	44
Non-Specialist Medical Practitioner MMM 1	2471	52
	2472	53
	2475	54
	2478	57
Non-Specialist Medical Practitioner MMM 2-7	2480	179
	2481	185
	2482	189
	2483	203

MBS item descriptors and explanatory notes for these items are available at www.mbsonline.gov.au

Question: Can doctors who practice outside MMM 6 and 7 areas provide the new telehealth services to eligible patients?

Yes. There is no restriction on the geographic location of the practitioner providing the new telehealth service. However, in order to provide the service to an eligible patient, the practitioner must have provided three face-to-face consultations to the patient in the preceding twelve months.

This will help to ensure that doctors providing the telehealth service are already familiar with the patient’s health and medical needs.

Question: How will these changes affect patients?

From 1 November 2019, people living in rural and remote communities will be able to request video consultations with their doctor that will be eligible for MBS rebates.

Only patients living in rural and remote areas (MMM 6-7 regions) will be eligible for the new service. Also, at the time when the service takes place, the patient and the doctor must be at least 15 kilometres apart by road.

Although there is no restriction on where the doctor is located, the patient and the doctor must already have an established clinical relationship. This means that the doctor must have seen the patient for a face-to-face consultation three times in the preceding twelve months.



Question: What will this change mean for GPs and non-specialist medical practitioners?

GPs and non-specialist medical practitioners will have greater flexibility when providing services to isolated patients. The new items will help to overcome restrictions imposed by remoteness and long travel times, allowing doctors to better manage their patients' health needs.

The new items are only available to medical practitioners who have an established clinical relationship with the patient requesting the telehealth consultation. This is to ensure that patients receive services from providers who are familiar with their health needs and are able to provide continuity of care.

For the purposes of the new arrangements, "established clinical relationship" means that the patient has had at least three face-to-face consultations in the preceding 12 months with the doctor providing the telehealth consultation.

Question: Can the new telehealth service be provided by telephone?

There is no restriction on the technology or software that doctors and patients use to contact one another. However, the patient and the doctor must be able to both see and hear each other. A Medicare benefit cannot be paid for a telephone-only consultation that does not also include video.

A mobile telephone using any of the variety of video-conferencing applications would be an acceptable device for providing a telehealth service, so long as the requirement that the service be a video consultation is met.

Question: Who was consulted on the changes?

The Department of Health consulted with stakeholders on key elements and principles of the new MBS telehealth arrangements for GPs and non-specialist medical practitioners. This included stakeholders representing general practice including the Australian Medical Association, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Question: How will the new items be monitored?

The Department of Human Services will monitor the use of the new MBS telehealth items by GPs and non-specialist medical practitioners. Use of the items that does not seem to be in accordance with the relevant Medicare guidelines and legislation will be referred to the Department of Health for appropriate action.

Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.

This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.