

Ongoing Telehealth drives innovation and gives everyone better access to healthcare

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The Consumers Health Forum welcomes the extension of Medicare coverage for telehealth consultations for GPs, allied health and specialists to the end of 2021.

To be able to consult with your health care provider by phone or video was an important step in making ongoing healthcare safer for patients during the early days of the pandemic.

“This was particularly essential for people with complex and chronic conditions who needed ongoing care.” said the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells.

Before the introduction of the telehealth items, there was fear and concern in the community about the spread and virulence of the virus, to the extent that many people stopped going to their regular medical appointments and were also not following up on referrals.

“It makes good use of the technology we already have, Ms Wells said.

“Ongoing, telehealth is about modernising Medicare.

“Telehealth supports treatment and management plans and has considerable benefits when combined with face-to-face consultations, Ms Wells said.

“It’s convenient for consumers and gives both health care providers and their patients the flexibility and choice to consider how telehealth best fits their needs.

“Telehealth also presents the opportunity to accelerate new ways of delivery health care – building on remote monitoring and consultations that are already happening in rural and other health care settings”, said Ms Wells.

“This means that many rural and regional patients receive fairer opportunities to access health care as they can more often avoid costly travel and accommodation in capital cities.

Australia should invest in digitisation across healthcare to enable improved patient care, and address access barriers such as poor internet and low digital literacy.

This investment also requires focused attention on reaching a balance between increasing the efficiency of sharing information across systems, while building safe repositories where consumers can trust that their personal information is protected.

In order to do this well, we need to develop a ‘national strategic plan for digital access and innovation’.

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“As telehealth becomes more commonplace, work also needs to be done on standards and quality”.

High quality telehealth and virtual care should be a part of healthcare for all. CHF calls on the government to make telehealth permanent under Medicare in the Federal Budget and a central feature of the 10 Year Primary Health Care Plan currently in development, as we said in our [pre-budget submission to the Federal Government](#) in January 2021. This was a recommendation in the COVID-19 Consumer Commission Report: [Making Health Better Together](#).

Ongoing access to high quality, affordable telehealth and virtual health care is a continuation of the uptake of technology to make healthcare for all consumers more accessible and affordable.

~ ENDS

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