



**Allied Health  
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# MEDIA RELEASE

## Expansion of COVID-19 telehealth measures to include more MBS allied health services

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AHPA welcomes yesterday's announcement by Federal Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt, that telehealth access has been expanded to include Medicare-funded allied health services. The Stage 4 measures, effective from today, are part of a whole-of-population approach by the Department of Health during the COVID-19 health crisis that will allow Australians to access a far wider array of important health services.

"We know many Australians are isolated, often on the basis of medical advice, because of their chronic condition, age, or exposure to vulnerable family members. These risk factors mean that they are at significantly greater risk if exposed to COVID-19", said Claire Hewat, CEO, Allied Health Professions Australia.

"Unfortunately, those very same factors that increase their risk in relation to COVID-19, also mean that they have a greater need for ongoing access to allied health services."

"Expanded access to telehealth services will allow many people to continue receiving important care from their whole health team, whether that is their GP, their specialist, or their allied health professional."

Under the expanded telehealth measures, people will be able to access important allied health services such as diabetes support, wound management, musculoskeletal rehabilitation care and services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder remotely. The bulk-billed services are based on existing Medicare items and build on the Stage 1 telehealth measures announced on 13 March for mental health services delivered by allied health providers.

"We know that as the lockdown continues, people will increasingly experience negative health outcomes if they can't access important care", said Ms Hewat.

"We strongly encourage people to contact their regular health practitioner to find out how to access telehealth services."

"Telehealth is particularly important for people living with complex and chronic disease, disability, and mental illness, as well as those undergoing rehabilitation after surgery or illness. It will enable people to access timely care for issues as they arise, possibly avoiding complications and even hospitalization", she said.

There is strong evidence for the use of telehealth practice by allied health practitioners whether by phone, video, SMS or email. While telehealth does not replace hands-on treatment and cannot address all health care problems, its safety and efficacy has been demonstrated across a range of professional activities



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including patient education, diagnostic assessment and discussion of results, counselling, evaluating intervention progress, guiding or supervising self-care strategies and exercise programs.

As the peak body for the allied health sector, AHPA is continuing to work with the Department of Health and other relevant departments to ensure that allied health providers can appropriately meet the ongoing care needs of Australians during the COVID-19 health crisis. We are also working with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, accident and compensation scheme providers and private health insurers to further increase access to remote telehealth services to ensure access for all Australians in need.

**CEO Claire Hewat is available for comment.**

**Please direct media inquiries to Philipp Herrmann, Manager – Policy and Communications.**

## About Allied Health Professions Australia

*AHPA is the national peak body representing Australia's allied health professions. We have 19 allied health member associations and a further ten affiliate members with close links to allied health. The AHPA membership represents some 130,000 allied health professionals working across a wide range of settings and sectors. A significant proportion of these allied health professionals work in primary care.*

Audiology Australia, Australian Chiropractors Association, Australian Podiatry Association, Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors, Australian Association of Social Workers, Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy, Australian Music Therapy Association, Australian Orthotic Prosthetic Association, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Psychological Society, Australian New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association, Australian and New Zealand College of Perfusionists, Exercise and Sports Science Australia, Occupational Therapy Australia, Optometry Australia, Orthoptics Australia, Osteopathy Australia, Rehabilitation Counselling Association of Australasia, Speech Pathology Australia.