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Telehealth

Telehealth consultations can enhance your face-to-face practice, extend your reach and increase patient satisfaction. It is a supplemental aid that can improve healthcare access and can be used in conjunction with face-to-face consultations, to maintain quality continuity of care services.

Telehealth helps you to:

- Reach more patients, more often
- Protect yourself against infectious diseases
- Provide convenient care for patients who live far from your practice – and improve patient satisfaction too
- Improve patient satisfaction because of the convenience Telehealth provides
- Work remotely – all you need is privacy and a secure internet connection
- Support patients who are too ill or infirm to leave home
- Support busy patients who can't afford time off work – may reduce patient 'no-shows'
- Increase revenue – treat more patients in the same time.

Just as with face-to-face consultations, a telehealth consultation needs to meet privacy and information security requirements relating to confidentiality, patient consent and medical records.

Learn more about implementing telehealth in your practice with the [RACGP's guide](#).



>85%

>85% of people who had a telehealth consultation in 2021–22 reported they would use a telehealth consultation again if offered.



118.2mil

Between 13 March 2020 and 31 July 2022, 118.2 million telehealth services have been delivered to 18 million patients, and more than 95,000 practitioners have now used telehealth services.

Should you use telephone or video for your telehealth consultations?

Wherever possible, we recommend video consultations.

Video provides important clinical benefits such as:

- Allowing you to make a visual assessment of a patient's wounds or their overall presentation
- Enabling you to pick up on important non-verbal cues about a patient's wellbeing
- Building a therapeutic relationship, which is easier to do when your patient can see you.

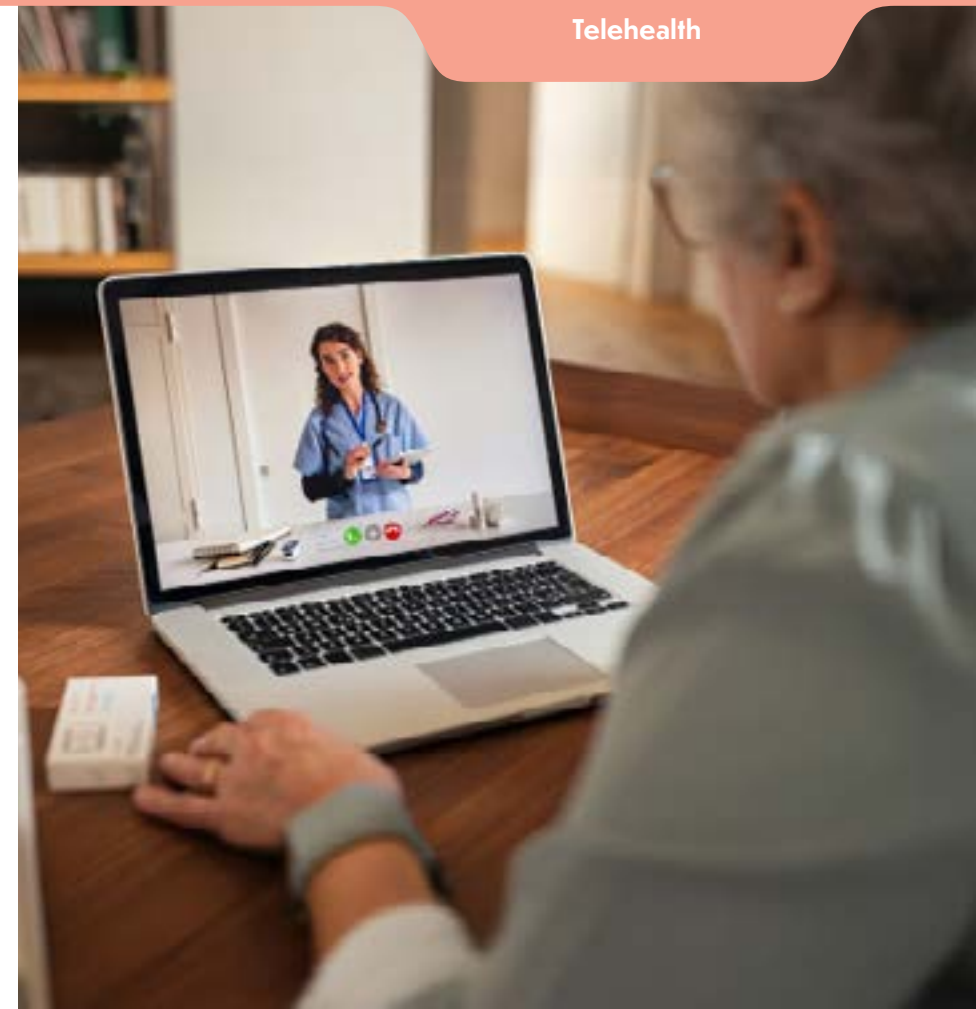
As a result, according to a systematic review by the University of Queensland¹¹, video proves superior to phone consultations in:

- Enhancing patient engagement and retention
- Improving transfer and triage decisions
- Reducing downstream Healthcare use
- Overall cost-effectiveness.

Western NSW PHN has partnered with [HealthDirect](#) to provide the CoviU-based Video Call platform free to primary care providers throughout the Western NSW region (subject to continued Commonwealth funding).



11. <https://coh.centre.uq.edu.au/article/2024/04/phone-versus-video-results-latest-systematic-review#>



Need help implementing telehealth?

Contact your digital coach

Western NSW Primary Health Network's digital coaches are here to help you implement telehealth in your practice.

If you have any questions or would welcome any help, please email digitalhealth.team@wnswphn.org.au or call **1300 699 167**.

Case Study:

Quality improvement in telehealth

The Challenge

Dr Dawda is a GP based in Canberra, ACT. His team provides person-centered health care for a large cohort of patients with complex and chronic needs, including those with disability and in aged care. These patients often find it difficult to visit the practice in person, so telehealth is often encouraged to support regular access to care.

Dr Dawda realised that fewer and fewer GPs in the community were willing to look after this growing and vulnerable population, as the costs were high and the incentives weren't in place from an MBS perspective. He was also hearing many criticisms of telehealth's limitations.

The Plan

But Dr Dawda and his team believe in a 'can do' culture. They decided to find innovative and economic ways of making a telehealth consult more engaging and relevant for both clinician and patient. The team realised that advances in tele-examination technology, or electronically-connected diagnostic devices, were happening in international markets, so they investigated the potential of trialing these at their practice. They soon discovered that there was a supplier of tele-examination equipment that could measure up to 80% of examination requirements (e.g. blood pressure, ears, breathing, weight, etc) virtually and all in real-time to a doctor at the other end of a computer during a telehealth consult.

Before they could bring the proposal to market, the team adopted a co-design approach, and advocated for a 'coalition of the willing' to be part of the pilot program. This involved local residential aged care homes and their nursing staff, the supplier

of the diagnostic equipment and university researchers to provide robust evaluation.

The Result

The pilot was so successful that they applied for a grant to continue funding the devices and for a support worker to visit patient homes to assist with use of the diagnostic equipment during a consultation.

This initiative proved that with a dedicated co-design approach to continuous improvement, blending a technology solution into an existing model of care can add real experiential value for patients and clinical value for doctors and nurses, whilst maintaining essential access to care.

Telehealth Checklist

To enable telehealth consultations for your patients.

Have a plan. Set up a meeting with your team and plan how to deliver Telehealth to your patients whether via telephone or video consultation. Establish policies and systems on how you will integrate this into your daily workflow. This is also the time for your GPs to check with their professional indemnity insurer about Telehealth consultations.

Technical, hardware and internet connection considerations. For telephone consultations all that is required is a telephone. If you wish to utilise video-call technology for your consults, you will need to ensure you have video equipment and a fast, secure, and reliable internet connection. Most laptops and tablet devices come with cameras in-built, but a simple webcam will be needed for any PC without a camera. Most webcams come with a microphone built in. You may also like to use a headset for more privacy and better audio quality.

Setup the consultation room.

Ensure that you have an appropriate workspace. Ensure the room has good lighting, sound quality, and can provide patient privacy. Consider requirements for any culturally safe approaches to care services.

Telehealth Resources

[HealthDirect Video Call Resource Centre](#)

[HealthPathways Telehealth Page](#)

[MBS Telehealth Item Numbers \(General Practice\)](#)

[RACGP Telehealth Guide for GPs](#)

[Australian Digital Health Agency](#)

Organise training for your clinicians and staff. If you decide to adopt the HealthDirect Video Call Platform, contact HealthDirect and arrange for a training session for your GPs and staff. Also ask for additional resources to prepare your practice for video consultations.

Be familiar with the temporary MBS item numbers for Telehealth. All Medicare eligible Australians can be bulk-billed for Telehealth. Your GPs should be familiar with the various Telehealth services that can be claimed through Medicare.

Support and troubleshooting.

Provide guides to your patients explaining how to use HealthDirect Video Call. Have HealthDirect's phone number handy in case something goes wrong during a video consultation and have a plan B in case there is a technical issue.

Conduct a test call. Before you go live, conduct a test video call to assess and fix any issues that may come up.

Implement Telehealth and seek feedback from patients.

Implement Telehealth and seek feedback from your GPs and patients to see if there are any areas for improvement.



An Australian Government Initiative

GET IN TOUCH

Headquarters

First Floor, 187 Brisbane Street
PO Box 890
DUBBO NSW 2830

Phone **1300 699 167**

Email **digitalhealth.team@wnswphn.org.au**

wnswphn.org.au

