

TEMPORARY TELEHEALTH BULK-BILLED ITEMS  
COVID-19

## Contents

1. Who is eligible? .....	4
2. What telehealth options are available?.....	4
3. What does this mean for providers?.....	4
4. How will these changes affect patients?.....	5
5. Where can I find more information?.....	5
6. Provider Fact Sheet Links .....	6
GPs and OMPS.....	6
Obstetric Attendance .....	6
Specialist .....	6

As part of the Australian Government's response to COVID-19, new temporary MBS telehealth items have been introduced to ensure continued access to essential Medicare rebated consultation services. As of 30 March 2020 these items have become general in nature and have no relation to diagnosing, treating or suspecting COVID-19. There are more Telehealth changes occurring and become operational today, others we understand, will be implemented over the next week to ten days. Members will be notified as soon as we receive confirmation. The current update is as follows:

- From 13 March 2020 to 30 September 2020 (inclusive), new temporary MBS telehealth items have been made available to help reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19 and provide protection for patients and health care providers.
- The list of telehealth services has continued to expand since 13 March. These are the latest factsheet and provides details on all current telehealth items.
- The new temporary MBS telehealth items are available to GPs, medical practitioners, nurse practitioners, participating midwives and allied health providers.
- A service may only be provided by telehealth where it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so.
- **From 6 April 2020, it is a legislative requirement that the new telehealth services must be bulk billed for Commonwealth concession cardholders, children under 16 years old and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19.**
- **Health providers may apply their usual billing practices to the telehealth items for patients who do not fit the above criteria. Providers are expected to obtain informed financial consent from patients prior to providing the service; providing details regarding their fees, including any out-of-pocket costs.**

## 1. Who is eligible?

The new temporary MBS telehealth items are available to providers of telehealth services for a wide range of consultations. All Medicare eligible Australians can now receive these services. **All services provided using the MBS telehealth items must be bulk billed for Commonwealth concession card holders, children under 16 years of age, and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19. For all other patients, bulk billing is at the discretion of the provider, so long as informed financial consent is obtained prior to the provision of the service.**

**Vulnerable means a patient at risk of COVID-19, so a person who:**

- is required to self-isolate or self-quarantine in accordance with guidance issued by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee in relation to COVID-19; or
- is at least 70 years old; or • if the person identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent—is at least 50 years old; or
- is pregnant; or • is the parent of a child aged under 12 months; or
- is being treated for a chronic health condition; or
- is immune compromised; or
- meets the current national triage protocol criteria for suspected COVID-19 infection.
- The services will be available until 30 September 2020. The continuing availability of these items will be reviewed prior to 30 September 2020.

## 2. What telehealth options are available?

Videoconference services are the preferred approach for substituting a face-to-face consultation. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providers will also be able to offer audio-only services via telephone if video is not available. There are separate items available for the audio-only services.

No specific equipment is required to provide Medicare-compliant telehealth services. Services can be provided through widely available video calling apps and software such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Duo, GoToMeeting and others.

Free versions of these applications (i.e. non-commercial versions) may not meet applicable laws for security and privacy. Practitioners must ensure that their chosen telecommunications solution meets their clinical requirements and satisfies privacy laws. It is recommended that you do not use free versions for doctor/patient privacy and security.

## 3. What does this mean for providers?

The new temporary MBS telehealth items will allow providers to continue to deliver essential health care services to patients within their care. Providers do not need to be in their regular practice to provide telehealth services. **Providers should use their provider number for their primary location, and must provide safe services in accordance with normal professional standards.** The telehealth MBS items will substitute current face-to-face consultations that are available under the MBS. The MBS telehealth items will have similar requirements to normal timed consultation items. **The telehealth items must be bulk billed for vulnerable patients, concession cardholders and children under 16 years at the time the service is being provided, meaning MBS rebates are paid to the provider.** For information regarding the Medicare assignment of benefit, please refer to the Provider Frequently Asked Questions document available on MBSOnline.

For information regarding the Medicare assignment of benefit, please refer to the [Provider Frequently Asked Questions](#) document available on MBSOnline.

#### 4. How will these changes affect patients?

The new temporary MBS telehealth items will require providers to bulk-bill only for vulnerable patients, concession cardholders and children under 16 years, so there will be no additional charge for these patients. Patients are required to consent to their service being bulk-billed. Eligible patients should ask their service providers about their telehealth options, where clinically appropriate.

A [consumer factsheet](#) is available on MBSOnline which provides further information on how these changes will affect patients.

#### 5. Where can I find more information?

COVID-19 National Health Plan resources for the general public, health professionals and industry are available from the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#).

The Department of Health provides an email advice service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules and the Health Insurance Act and associated regulations. If you have a query relating to the COVID-19 telehealth MBS items please email [COVIDResponse@health.gov.au](mailto:COVIDResponse@health.gov.au). For all other queries relating to all other items in the Schedule, please email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au). You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

## 6. Provider Fact Sheet Links

### **GPs and OMPS**

[http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/\\$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20GPs%20and%20OMPs%20060420.pdf](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20GPs%20and%20OMPs%20060420.pdf)

### **Obstetric Attendance**

[http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/\\$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20Obsattendance%20060420.pdf](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20Obsattendance%20060420.pdf)

### **Specialist**

[http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/\\$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20Specialists%20060420.pdf](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/0C514FB8C9FBBEC7CA25852E00223AFE/$File/COVID-19%20Bulk-billed%20MBS%20telehealth%20Services%20-%20Specialists%20060420.pdf)

[Provider Frequently Asked Questions.docx](#)

[Provider Frequently Asked Questions.pdf](#)

[Psychiatry Frequently Asked Questions.docx](#)

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