



Press Release

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Australians urged to access telehealth services for mental health treatment

Private Healthcare Australia Chief Executive Dr Rachel David has urged Australians suffering from mental health issues to seek assistance through the safe and widely available telehealth options that are now in place.

The expansion of telehealth and online services across the Australian health system has been remarkable in recent weeks and many of these are designed to deal with the expected spike in demand for mental health treatment during COVID-19.

Since introducing rebates for telehealth psychology services on 30 March, thousands of Australians with private health insurance have embraced telehealth for physiotherapy, podiatry, speech pathology, dietetics and exercise physiology.

“People with private health insurance have really jumped on board with telehealth over the last six weeks and I encourage consumers to continue to make use of these services that have been put in place to support them,” Dr David said.

“Health funds have taken an evidence-based approach, and we’ve worked quickly and closely with professional associations to ensure that people have access to appropriate telehealth services.”

The evidence shows that telehealth can be an effective tool to deliver a range of services, particularly when there is an existing relationship between the patient and the provider, or where the patient would not normally be able to access services (for example, geographically isolated).

Dr David praised professional associations who responded with urgency to PHA’s request for evidence of the effectiveness of telehealth for their professions, enabling health funds to move quickly to ensure their members were covered for telehealth services.

“It’s a story of cooperation. Many allied health professions are expanding training for their members, helping introduce IT systems, and in some cases, investing in evaluation programs. While health funds have been investing in their own telehealth initiatives for a number of years, the move into mass coverage for telehealth has been remarkably quick. I expect we are just beginning to see the potential of telehealth services funded by private health insurance.”

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About PHA

Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia’s private health insurance industry. PHA represents 24 Australian health funds with a combined membership of over 13 million Australians, or 97% of the sector on membership.

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