



MEDIA RELEASE

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CATHOLIC HOSPITALS WELCOME TELEHEALTH FUNDING EXTENSION BUT ARGUE IT SHOULD BE A PERMANENT FIXTURE

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) says the Federal Government's decision to extend the current list of Medicare services delivered via telehealth to March 2021 is welcome, but that it should remain beyond the pandemic.

Funding for the majority of telehealth services was due to end on September 30 but a \$2 billion subsidy will now ensure patients will still be able to access everything from early childhood appointments and neurological rehabilitation to mental health and drug abuse treatment.

CHA Director of Health Policy James Kemp said both patients and providers have benefited from the boom in telehealth provision.

"When COVID-19 hit, very few Australians were able to access telehealth services. But, six months into this pandemic, telehealth has transformed the way we deliver healthcare. It's been embraced by both clinicians and patients, it's providing value for money and a high standard of care," said Mr Kemp.

"Telehealth should be here to stay and CHA strongly urges the Government to make it part of Australia's health landscape beyond March 2020."

Before COVID-19 hit, virtual care attendances accounted for only 0.1% of all MBS-funded attendance but since March more than 30 million consultations have been delivered by telehealth, benefiting more than 10 million Australians.

Mr Kemp says the telehealth extension will prove particularly effective in reaching regional Australians as well as marginalised communities.

Mr Kemp said: "Telehealth has been key to be able to reach patients from rural or remote areas or the poor and marginalised in our communities.

"It's saving people time and money from having to travel hundreds of kilometres for follow-up consultation services and it's been transformative for the most vulnerable members of our community.

"For services such as mental health and post-natal services, our members are reporting high attendance rates for critical consultations, and this means that care is being accessed at the right time.

"Many people from vulnerable groups can find it difficult getting to their doctor. This is understandable and something very easily solved by telehealth.

"The feedback we have had from both patients and from clinicians has been overwhelmingly positive. Telehealth works for the patient and for health providers."

CHA says the last six months had been a huge learning curve for hospital providers across the country and that it's now time to embed telehealth.



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Mr Kemp said: "We now have an opportunity to work with providers and the government to ensure that we can lock in a sustainable and practical solution that best serves the poor, vulnerable and marginalised and is there for the future.

"It's critically important that we get the delivery of telehealth right and ensure it augments the care our hospitals can deliver. It will not replace face to face consultations, but it is important to have the option there when patients need it.

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