



Psychological services via telehealth (videoconference) for people living in rural and remote Australia

INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

Rural people experiencing mental health issues may find it difficult to access psychological services without travelling a significant distance. To address this, Medicare rebates are now available for psychological services delivered via telehealth (videoconference) to people in rural and remote Australia.

What is 'psychological' treatment?

There are effective psychological treatments available for a range of mental health issues including depression, anxiety, eating disorders and many others. Sometimes referred to as 'talking therapies', psychological treatment helps people to make changes in their lives to better cope with stress, conflict and other issues. It often involves doing homework between consultations to try out new skills.

If you live in a small rural community, you may be worried about your privacy when seeing a mental health professional. Receiving psychological treatment by videoconference can help ease these concerns. Your clinician will explain the steps they'll take to protect your privacy and confidentiality.

What is telehealth?

Telehealth refers to a videoconference consultation involving communication between you and your clinician using both a video and audio connection. This is similar to connecting with family, friends or business contacts using programs such as FaceTime or Zoom. Some providers will require you to download special software.

How do I know if I am eligible to access telehealth psychological services?

To be eligible to receive these services under Medicare for a mental health condition, you must:

- have an eligible mental health condition and a referral from a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician
- live in an eligible rural, remote or very remote location¹
- be located at least 15 kilometres by road from the mental health professional
- not be a patient of an emergency department or admitted to hospital at the time of the service.

In some cases, it may not be appropriate to receive psychological treatment by telehealth; your referring doctor and/or mental health professional will discuss this with you.

¹ Eligible regions are those classified as 4 to 7 by the Modified Monash Model of geographical classification. Enter a postcode into the interactive map on this website to find the classification of a particular location: doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/publishing.nsf/Content/MMM_locator

Who can provide psychological treatment by telehealth under Medicare?

Psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists that hold a Medicare provider number and meet the remaining criteria can offer this service – see below.

How do I find an eligible mental health provider who can offer treatment by telehealth?

Not all mental health professionals will have the facilities to provide this service.

You can locate a provider through the following websites:

- *Psychologists* – Australian Psychological Society Find a Psychologist™ service psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist
- *Social Workers* – Australian Association of Social Workers aasw.asn.au
- *Occupational Therapists* – Occupational Therapy Australia otaus.com.au

It is a good idea to contact potential providers to find out if they're able to provide a service by telehealth.

How much will it cost?

It depends on the length of the consultation and the fee being charged by the mental health professional. Like medical practitioners, some providers bulk-bill (so there is no out-of-pocket cost to you). Other providers will require you to pay a gap fee. Check the cost of the service with the provider before you start your treatment.

If you access the telehealth consultation using your personal technology (e.g., smart phone, laptop or iPad) you will also be responsible for your own internet data and/or phone charges.

How many treatment sessions can be accessed?

You can receive up to 10 sessions with a mental health professional per calendar year.

Only seven out of the 10 sessions can be conducted via telehealth. One of the first four consultations must be a face-to-face consultation. This is important to establish a strong relationship with your treating professional.



What equipment do you need to access the service?

You will need access to a *quiet, private space*; a device, i.e. smartphone, laptop, iPad, computer, with a camera, microphone and speakers; and a reliable broadband internet connection.

If you don't have the necessary equipment it may be possible to access telehealth equipment through your GP or local community centre.

Is a telehealth consultation as effective as a face-to-face consultation?

Psychological treatment provided using videoconferencing technology has been found to be as effective as a face-to-face appointment for a variety of mental health problems. Your GP and mental health provider will talk to you about whether telehealth consultations are appropriate and suitable for you.

I am already travelling a long distance to see a mental health provider (face-to-face) under Medicare. Can I transfer to a telehealth service with them?

If you are currently receiving face-to-face psychological treatment under Medicare you may be eligible for telehealth services. Speak with your treating mental health professional about the availability of these services.

Where can I find more information about accessing telehealth?

See the professional association websites (listed above) for more information or visit the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba-telehealth