

Government update for Allied Health re: Covid-19. “Primary Care and Allied Health Professionals” Presented by Medical Advisers for Allied Health – Professor Michael Kidd AM and Dr Andrew Singer, Department of Health, 26th March 2020

Summary of Essential Take Home Points

Telehealth and Continuation of Treatment Services

Continued treatment of Allied health and Medical services is deemed to be an ESSENTIAL SERVICE in consideration of service provision during COVID-19 and in the event of any lockdown staging. Further to that **in the event of a “Stage 4” Lockdown**, at this stage all Essential Services, including Allied Health, are to remain open, although this is currently under discussion.

All Allied Health are encouraged to provide Telehealth consults to patients/clients wherever feasible and possible. However, if patients do not have access to telehealth/on-line options, or due to the nature of their acute/chronic condition and risk of adverse outcomes they require face to face treatment, then it is appropriate and important to continue to provide that treatment face to face. The Government does not want patients/clients to miss out on essential treatment if they have acute or chronic health conditions.

The Government is hoping to provide an Algorithm soon to help Allied Health Professionals determine which patients are appropriate to see face to face vs Telehealth. This will become available on the Federal Government Health Department website www.health.gov.au For those patients with no access to Telehealth/ on-line services or smart phones, a home program may be appropriate. Elderly patients may require family or others to assist with technology if it is appropriate to do so.

Rebates

Currently there are NO rebates available for Telehealth Consultations provided to private or EPC patients by Allied Health Professionals however the Federal Government is working on an expansion of codes for online use in the next one–three weeks. All Allied Health are advocating for rebates as top priority, given the circumstances and urgency of the current crisis.

Personal Protective Equipment- PPE

The Government is fast tracking importation and local production of PPE due to a global shortage. Currently if both patient and therapist are presenting as in good health, advice is that PPE is not required. Continue with handwashing, cough etiquette and social distancing measures. Therapists and patients who are unwell then they should NOT be attending face to face appointments. Clients to also wash hands and follow hygiene guidelines.

Screening Patients

If a patient has any symptoms or had close contact with someone who has tested positive, patient must ring ahead and not attend. Practice to have signs up warning people of the rules.

NDIS and Home Visits

Continue to provide essential services as appropriate, as it’s important to keep patients well and away from emergency rooms. Continue to follow hygiene guidelines and practice.

Training

COVID-19 training for health workers is available online <https://covid-19training.gov.au/> and certificate available on completion. This takes 15 – 30 minutes to complete and is highly recommended for all Allied Health.

Testing Guidelines

New testing guidelines will be available on www.health.gov.au as they come to hand. Restrictions to testing still applies according to Government criteria.

Government Assistance for Private Practice

Government assistance is available if a business needs to close due to COVID-19 (due to reduced patient numbers). This would come under the category of small business assistance and Government support is available now.

For all other information and regular updates visit www.health.gov.au