

Telehealth

1 January 2013 changes

Change to telehealth geographical eligibility

From 1 January 2013 the geographic eligibility criteria for telehealth Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) items will be amended.

Eligibility will be determined according to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Area (ASGC-RA) classifications. MBS benefits will now only be available for services provided to patients outside of RA1 – Major Cities.

Specialists will still be able to provide a video consultation from anywhere in Australia.

This change does not affect residents of Aged Care Facilities or patients of eligible Aboriginal Medical Services or eligible Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services who are exempt from the geographical requirements.

Reason for the change

The Australian Government has introduced this change to better target funding to areas where access to specialist services is limited.

This will encourage people living in major cities to maintain relationships with local specialists, and provide patients living outside major cities, access to specialist video consultations where availability and distance is a barrier to accessing these services.

The move to the ASGC-RA classification system creates a fairer system. The ASGC-RA defines remoteness areas based on population and proximity to population centres.

Impact on patients

Some areas will become ineligible because of these changes (for example Canberra),

however, some patients will become eligible because of these changes (for example all patients in Tasmania).

Patients and providers can still check their eligibility by following the links on the MBS Online website (www.mbsonline.gov.au/telehealth).

Introduction of short telehealth consultation items

From 1 January 2013, new MBS telehealth items will be introduced for initial specialist and consultant physician attendances where the video consultation is ten minutes or less. These services will attract fees which are approximately 50% of the relevant initial consultation performed via telehealth.

Financial incentives will still apply to the new services.

There will be no change for initial specialist or consultant physician video consultations which are more than ten minutes in duration.

Reason for the change

Practices have emerged which do not meet the normal expectations for an initial consultation with a specialist.

The Australian Government has introduced this change to allow the MBS fees and benefits to reflect the time and complexity of the service being provided. Currently, a video consultation with a specialist or consultant physician of less than 10 minutes can attract rebates and financial incentives of over \$250.00.

Impact on patients

There is expected to be minimal impact on patients.