

‘Living with COVID’ means living with caution

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The Consumers Health Forum has welcomed the Federal Government’s additional support for community-based care for COVID cases but urges Australians to take care as Australia transitions to ‘living with COVID’ arrangements.

“The easing of lockdowns and opening of borders mean that even with an overall decline in pandemic risks, significant challenges for both hospitals and primary care doctors and nurses in the community will continue. Consumers need to play their part in avoiding infection by continuing with sensible anti-COVID precautions,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.,

“We support the Federal Government’s announcement of a range of measures to bolster the capacity of community-based services to respond to continuing demands for primary care posed by the ongoing prevalence of COVID-19, as travel restrictions are eased,” Ms Wells said.

The ‘living with COVID’ arrangements will include readying the Healthdirect national call centre to connect people testing positive to appropriate care, including through COVID Community Care Pathways involving collaboration between the 31 Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and their corresponding local hospital networks.

Other measures will include additional Medicare support for GPs seeing COVID-positive patients face-to-face, home visits by practice nurses and doctors with a particular focus on regional and rural areas, supplying pulse oximeters and personal protective equipment (PPE) to general practice and other primary health care settings seeing COVID positive people, with particular emphasis on strengthening the supply chain for rural and remote practices. Patients will be asked to take regular readings and will be carefully monitored for any sign of deterioration.

General Practice Respiratory Clinics will remain so people can safely attend for assessment and management rather than presenting at an emergency department in non-urgent circumstances.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is urgently updating its COVID-19 Management Guidelines for GPs to include treatment of COVID positive patients with moderate symptoms and to support care for COVID-19 positive people at home.

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Ms Wells said that the Federal Government's separate announcement today of an advance for primary health care was also welcome. Medicare will now cover allied health professionals' case conferencing for people with chronic diseases and young children with developmental disorders.

"This is a positive advance towards more comprehensive health care. Under the change, allied health professionals will be paid to attend multidisciplinary conferences held by the patient's regular doctor – in person, via video conference or phone – to discuss diagnosis, care and treatment plans.

"We know with chronic conditions like diabetes and mental illness, and in children with disorders such as autism, there is often a pressing need for the patient's treating doctor and allied health professionals to be able to consult each other in order to focus on the individual's effective care options.

"This addition to Medicare-covered services to reimburse allied health professionals for case conferencing makes these advice options more of a reality for many patients who otherwise might not be able to access such advice let alone afford the additional costs where such avenues did exist.

"CHF supports the words of Health Minister, Greg Hunt, who said today that 'the additional items will improve care coordination and deliver better outcomes to patients with complex needs who have multiple care providers. Working together, health care teams can make an enormous difference to the diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care of many vulnerable Australians'.

"CHF has long advocated for Medicare to cover more coordinated and integrated care involving GPs working with allied health professionals because it is the logical and effective step towards better health care," Ms Wells said.

Details of the Medicare change, including benefits payable are [here](#).

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