

Telehealth now a permanent part of Medicare

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The announcement today assuring telehealth's future as a permanent part of Medicare acknowledges its vital role in enabling access to GPs, specialists and allied health professionals, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

"Telehealth has been transformational to health care delivery during COVID and will continue to provide a platform for much future care," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"We agree with the Health Minister, Greg Hunt, that telehealth underpinned much of the Government's successful COVID-19 response.

"But as we, hopefully, move past the pandemic we need to ensure that telehealth can be used to the benefit of consumers and doctors while ensuring that patients still see the doctor face-to-face when they need to"

"Telehealth is important to consumers, who want to have choices around when and how they use it. There will be patients in high need categories, who would benefit from a combination of in-person care, supplemented by virtual options.

"The option of having a consultation with a health care professional by phone, facetime or zoom modernised Medicare and is a long overdue improvement to the way healthcare is delivered to patients".

"But telehealth does raise the potential for technological challenges to the efficacy of a health care consultation. Consumers have raised internet and data issues, including quality and availability of connections in rural areas, and data cost, usage and access issues more broadly.

"Many consumers need better internet access, including home/phone data and community facilities, to benefit from telehealth and such issues must be addressed to ensure equity of access to telehealth..

"We must work to ensure that the availability of digitally enabled means of delivering health services does not inadvertently create more health inequities," Ms Wells said.

ENDS

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Consumers shaping health