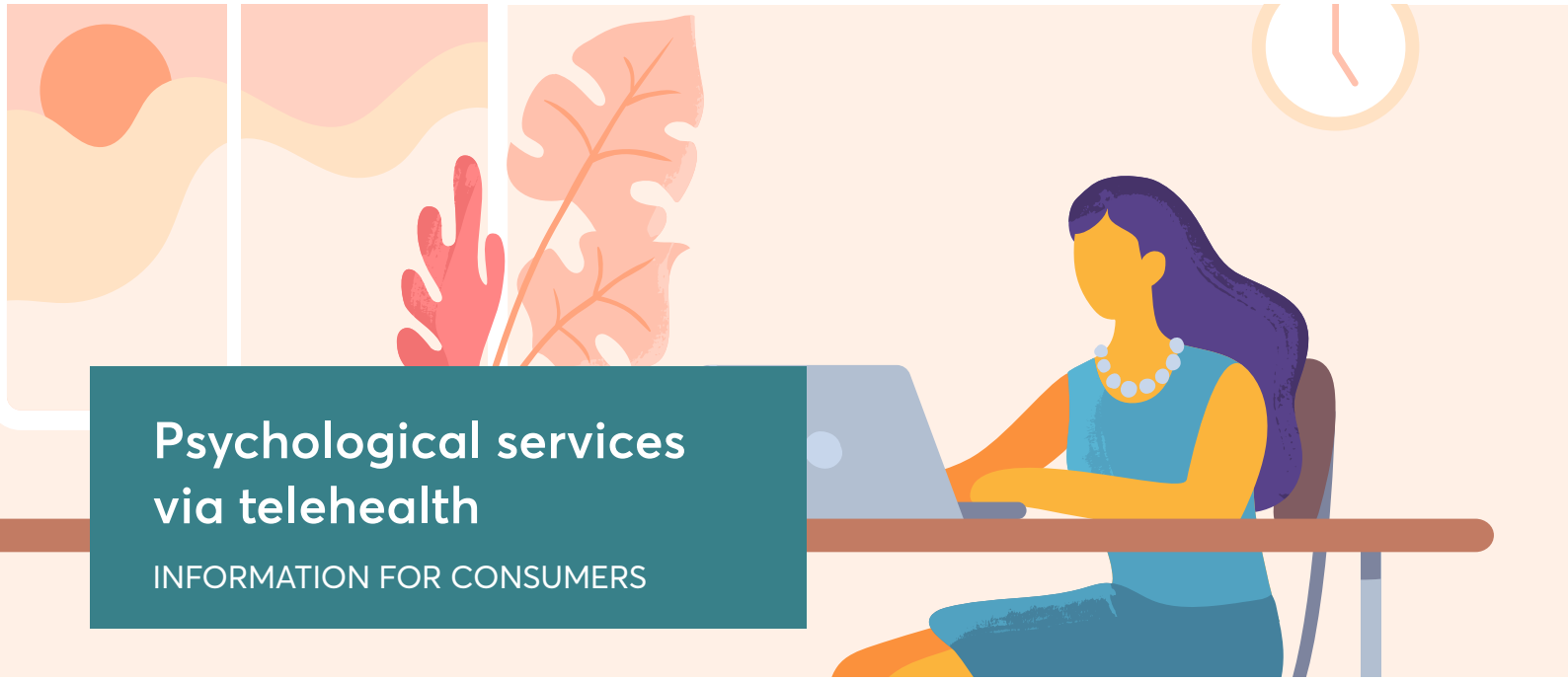

Psychological services via telehealth

INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

To help support the mental health of all Australians during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Australian Government has announced that eligible people will be able to access Medicare rebates for psychological services delivered via telehealth (i.e., videoconference or phone).

What is telehealth?

Telehealth refers to a videoconference consultation involving communication between you and your psychologist 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.

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 that may be experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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:

- be eligible to receive services under Medicare under a particular program of funding
- have an eligible mental health condition and a referral from a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician
- 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.

How much will it cost?

The cost of the service will depend on the length of the consultation and the fee being charged by the psychologist. 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., smartphone, laptop or iPad) you will also be responsible for your own internet data and/or phone charges.

How many treatment sessions can be accessed?

The number of sessions to be provided via telehealth are the same as those that you would have received as face-to-face sessions under the Medicare-funded program.

What equipment do you need to access the service?

For videoconferencing you will need access to a quiet, private space, a device (e.g., smartphone, laptop, iPad, computer) with a camera, microphone and speakers and a reliable broadband internet connection.

If you don't have the necessary equipment for videoconferencing it may be possible to access telehealth equipment through your GP or local community centre or alternatively you could access services by telephone.

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 psychologist will talk to you about whether telehealth consultations are appropriate and suitable for you.

I am already seeing a psychologist (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 will be eligible for telehealth services if your specific requirements can be met through telehealth. Speak with your treating psychologist about the appropriateness of a telehealth service for you and their ability and availability to provide telehealth services.

The APS has a number of resources available to assist Australians in managing their mental health during the coronavirus outbreak, including advice for maintaining your mental health during social isolation, and tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety.

Visit psychology.org.au for more.

Seek support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your child experience as a result of COVID-19 is impacting on everyday life, a psychologist may be able to help.

Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals, skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.

If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

Finding a psychologist

There are number of ways to access a psychologist. You can:

- use the Australia-wide Find a Psychologist™ service. Go to findapsychologist.org.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

Top tips for preparing for telehealth services

- **Maintain privacy:** Make sure you have a suitable private space. Think about who else can potentially overhear the conversation. Who else will be in the room? Who is in the room next door?
- **Minimise distractions:** Remove potential distractions from the room (e.g., mobile phone switched off, turn off music/television, no interruptions from others, ensure children are cared for during the session so you don't need to attend to them).
- **Access to technology:** Make sure you have access to appropriate technology (e.g., computer/tablet/phone, camera, microphone) and a reliable internet connection for videoconferencing, telephone or mobile with reliable coverage.
- **Good visibility:** Position the camera appropriately so the psychologist can see you clearly on the screen. Make sure you are in a space that is well-lit, allowing a clear image and good eye contact.
- **Presentation:** Think about how you present yourself. Is it appropriate for you to be in your pyjamas?
- **Questions:** Think about any questions you have for the psychologist about telehealth services (e.g., privacy and security queries).

The Australian Psychological Society Limited
PO Box 38, Flinders Lane, VIC, 8009
Telephone: (03) 8662 3300 or 1800 333 497
Fax: (03) 9663 6177
Email: membership@psychology.org.au
Web: psychology.org.au
Find us on social media

ABN 23 000 543 788 © 2022