

Allied Health, general practitioner, and medical specialist use of MBS telehealth funding: Implication for post-pandemic Australia

Presenter: Dr Liam Caffery

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Via Zoom [https://unimelb.zoom.us/j/81459469417?
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Prior the COVID pandemic there was limited Medicare Benefit Scheme subsidy for telehealth. Where subsidies did exist, they were by-and-large for specialist video consultations and geographically constrained to patients who lived outside of metropolitan areas. Thereby indicating the intention of MBS funding was to improve access to specialist care for Australians living in regional and remote Australia.

In 2020, telehealth subsidies in the form of temporary item numbers were introduced to Medicare Benefits Schedule as part of the pandemic response. These allowed some core health care services to be delivered without the risk of viral transmission. Geographical constraints were removed, the modality of telehealth was widened to include telephone consultations when a video consultation was not possible. Also, GPs and (some) allied health services were now eligible to deliver MBS subsidised teleconsultations.

Since the introduction of the temporary telehealth item number there have been 62.1 million telehealth consultation subsidised by Medicare. Around 90% of services are delivered by telephone and only 10% have been delivered by video conference. Telehealth represents around 20% of all MBS subsidised consultations. However, the proportion of telehealth varies by professional group ranging from 2% for Allied Health, 18% for Specialists and 28% for GPs.



Liam is an Associate Professor in Telehealth and Director of Telehealth Technology for the University of Queensland's Centre for Online Health. His research is centred on pragmatic trials of telehealth services. He is involved in telehealth service development, delivery and evaluation across a broad range of telehealth services. Liam has a special interest in the use of telehealth for Indigenous health and rural health care delivery.

Liam is Vice-President of the Australian Telehealth Society and an executive member of the International Teledermatology Society. He is the technology lead for the Australia Centre of Excellence in Melanoma Imaging and Diagnosis – a national teledermatology network for melanoma screening of high-risk patients.

Liam has 25 years industry experience as a health informatician. His immediate past role was the Manager of Medical Imaging Informatics at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. Previously, Liam had over a decade's clinical experience as a diagnostic radiographer.