

Patients feeling better with Telehealth

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"I was more relaxed in my consultation. I was in my familiar environment and the specialist and I were both at ease. I didn't have the stress of getting the two people I care for sorted before the 90-minute drive to the city hospital for this appointment. I saved money on fuel and parking fees. I didn't have to sit in a full waiting room. I didn't have to turn down work for that entire day because of the travel time and waiting room time blowouts. The benefits of telehealth are immense."

— Australia's Health Panel respondent.

The introduction of the expanded Telehealth Medicare benefit has drawn strong support from respondents to an Australia's Health Panel survey, an initiative of the Consumers Health Forum.

The [Telehealth services survey](#) found that more than 80 per cent of those who were offered telehealth services used it. Of these a similar proportion viewed the service as excellent or good quality.

"This response gives us any early indication of the value of telehealth particularly at a time of health anxiety as we are experiencing at present with COVID-19," the CEO of Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"As the respondent's comments quoted above show, telehealth offers considerable medical and social benefits for the many patients who may need to consult a doctor but do not require physical examination.

"CHF has also recently completed a survey on a related issue of access to medical care --- [after hours services](#). This showed that while most people expect they should be able to get care after hours, many people encounter significant difficulties.

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“While the telehealth survey was of modest size, the overwhelmingly favourable response indicates strong community support for the scheme to continue in the post-COVID era.

“An interesting result was that slightly more panellists said the telehealth consultations were better than face-to-face consultations compared to those who preferred face-to-face services.

“The survey found that key barriers to telehealth services were lack of access to required technology, unreliable internet access and non-awareness of the option.

“These sorts of issues will need to be resolved if telehealth services are available equally to all Australians. This initiative might have become imperative because of the necessities triggered by COVID, but telehealth and digital technology generally is becoming routine and the way of the future.

“The survey on after hours care found more than two thirds of respondents had used after hours primary care at least once in the previous five years, with 43 per cent accessing services between 8pm and 11 pm and 20 per cent between 11pm and 7am.

“There can be big differences from one region to another in availability of services, often with rural areas having meagre services. The great variation is shown by the survey results which found 24 per cent of respondents reported easy-to-access after-hours services, 18 per cent found it difficult and 25 per cent extremely difficult to get care outside of business hours.

“The results of these two surveys offer fresh impetus for the Government to exploit telehealth further in ways that bridge the gap in access to Medicare between city and country,” Ms Wells said.

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