

Statement on Current National Directions in Telehealth for Australia

The Australasian Telehealth Society (ATHS) endorses the recent establishment of new MBS items for video consultations under the *Connecting Health Services with the Future: Modernising Medicare by Providing Rebates for Online Consultations* initiative and believes that this will provide access to healthcare for all Australians based on need and not just location. This positive move implies an indication of a national intent to grow the scope and scale of Telehealth initiatives led by the government health system. As the recognised Australasian international representative professional body in the area of Telehealth, whose members have a key interest and significant experience in telehealth initiatives, we offer the following statement in support of this growth direction.

ATHS believes there is a range of needs which will need to be met and issues to be resolved, to ensure widespread adoption and further enhancement of the initiatives, including:

- A. Infrastructure
 - Coordination of a national cooperative approach to help shape technical and operational aspects of Telehealth services for video consultations (and more generally), including leverage of current telecommunications infrastructure development (e.g. NBN) and existing video consultation systems (e.g. jurisdictional networks).
 - Development of a structured national Telehealth operations network which:
 - supports all parties by providing facilities and resources underpinning the services, including directory and interoperability services, and
 - allows clinicians and patients to choose technologies which suit their clinical service delivery preferences.
- B. Information and Communication
 - Coordination and sharing of common standards or guidelines, based on clinical and technical experience, to inform parties who are currently or are considering participation in video consultations for Telehealth services.
 - The development of a practical implementation guide (both technically and operationally) for clinicians who are considering the introduction of video consultations for Telehealth service delivery or are reviewing their current capacity for the delivery of clinical telehealth service delivery.
 - The development and publication of a common listing of specialists and GP clinics who are willing to conduct Telehealth consultations
- C. Clinical models of care
 - Consideration to include MBS charging for other models of care which do not have the same clinical requirements for synchronous vs asynchronous images such as ophthalmology, dermatology and other image based applications.
 - Encourage the colleges to work together in developing and sharing guidelines in order to share research and experience in Telehealth service delivery
 - Support, both financial and/or technical, to promote other existing clinical use cases including:
 - Case conferencing – patient to clinician/s,
 - Home monitoring, and
 - Patient to community support (eg Cancer support groups)

Furthermore, we believe that there is a strong need for more comprehensive investigation and planning around national use of more far-reaching Telehealth technologies in the future (such as telecollaboration, telemonitoring, teleprocedures and telesurgery). These and the above aspects could all be addressed by the establishment of a single peak national representative group to foster joint policy and strategy development, and advise on the development of materials and facilities. Such a peak body could take carriage of liaison with governance agencies, lead consultation and consensus processes with stakeholder bodies, and provide repository and dissemination functions for related information.