

# COVID-19 and Telehealth Provision for Health Providers

The healthcare system in New Zealand will face significant pressures due to the Covid-19 outbreak. We will need to work in different ways from usual, so to support this, the following advice sets out some of the general guidance on using telehealth in New Zealand at this time.

Please note this is an iterative document as we respond to the evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 situation. We are actively working on developing additional resources for both healthcare consumers and providers. The latest information will always be available at [www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz)

## Use a phone or video consultation as much as possible

A health professional does not always need to see a patient in-person providing it is clinically appropriate. Wherever possible, a telephone or video consultation should be considered for these interactions. Some clinicians may also choose to utilise secure email. The focus should be on what information you share and who you share it with, rather than how you share it.

Remember this form of consultation will be new for many. Take the time to discuss with your patient if they feel comfortable with this approach.

## Benefits and scenarios for telehealth

In the best of times, telehealth reduces unnecessary travel and efficiently provides quality care irrespective of a patient's or clinician's location. These benefits can and should be leveraged to help fight the spread of COVID-19. Telehealth is a critical way that providers can reduce risk while maintaining close relationships with their patients.

Some examples include:

- people accessing essential health services from their home, for example, all GP consultations should be conducted by phone, video or secure email unless there is a clear need for a physical examination or procedure that can only be done at a clinic
- a follow-up appointment with a specialist, or an appointment with allied health professionals
- our vulnerable population accessing health services with reduced risk of exposure, for example, patients with underlying medical conditions or the elderly accessing health services
- health professionals continuing to provide health services from their home while they undergo self-isolation.

## Health consumers

There is a very high acceptance from patients that have participated in a telehealth consultation, and it is unusual for patients to decline a consultation by telehealth once given the option. In a recent study by Waitemata DHB, over 88% of patients said they would book more telehealth appointments in the future.



Waikato DHB research found similarly high levels of support from Maori whanau.

Many health consumers however are new to telehealth, so there is significant work that must be undertaken to make consumers aware of telehealth, and they must be provided with very clear instructions. Many organisations, including [www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz) and [www.healthnavigator.org.nz](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz) are rapidly developing resources.

Up to 20% of the population however will not have access or skills to embrace telehealth, and this percentage may be higher for our high needs population. Work is underway to identify and remove some of these barriers. In the interim, it is essential to start providing these services to those that are willing and able.

Patients should expect to be charged the same as they do for an equivalent in-person consultation.

Recording of video consultations by any party should only occur by mutual consent. Additional guidance on this will be provided.

## Health providers

Health providers should first seek guidance from within their organisation. Most District Health Boards have some telehealth capability and are working with haste to expand this. Primary healthcare providers should seek advice and support from their Primary Health Organisation (PHO). Again many are rapidly developing guidance on telehealth.

All health professionals should be aware of and consider regulations, standards and guidelines from their professional bodies. (refer [www.telehealth.org.nz/regulations-and-policies/regulations-and-standards](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/regulations-and-policies/regulations-and-standards))

The overarching principle is that all health providers should use their clinical judgement to decide if the telehealth consultation is clinically appropriate. If the telehealth quality is poor, and a phone consultation is inadequate, or if a physical examination is required, then an in-person appointment should be made. If any significant wellbeing or safety concerns arise during the consultation escalate these as per your usual protocol.

You should safeguard personal/confidential patient information in the same way you would with any other consultation.

The consent of the patient or service user is implied by them accepting the invite and entering the consultation. However, good practice would be to confirm this on commencing. Remember to confirm patient identity before progressing the consultation.

[www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz) and [www.healthnavigator.org.nz](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz) are developing resources rapidly to assist with this urgent shift to telehealth.

## Implementation

A lot of patience is required during any change. Please be mindful of this and carefully support staff and patients as they adapt to these changes. Consider starting with phone and email and then step into using video solutions. We recommend providers become familiar with technology available and start small. Practice within your organisation before starting a pilot with a small number of patients.



## Consumer software and messaging apps

Most consumer social media messaging apps including (but not limited to) FaceTime, Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat and Skype should not be used unless there is no practical alternative. These apps generally have end-to-end encryption, but user data may be harvested and used in various algorithms. Often these services are also based on personal profiles, blurring the boundary between professional and personal.

We encourage the use of business-grade software solutions which are currently used or endorsed in NZ by established health providers who have completed both Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) and Cloud Risk Assessment (CRA). We encourage all organisations and companies to work towards completing their own PIA and CRA. However some guidance can be taken from the following providers that are currently active in the NZ health sector.

Primary Care Patient Management System (PMS) providers with video integrated:

- Indici
- MedTech, ManageMyHealth
- Profile

Telehealth platform providers which include patient waiting area and payment platform

- Doxy.Me
- Coviu

Video providers

- Cisco Jabber (Spark & Dimension Data)
- Polycom Real Presence (Vivid Solutions & Spark)
- Vidyo (Telesmart)
- Zoom (ConnectNZ & Zoom.us)

We are actively working on expanding this list and on providing example case studies of implementations in various applications. These will be available at [www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz). We encourage industry partners to make contact with us.



## Security

Health providers may need to work from home. If personal equipment is being used then:

- software (systems, browsers, applications) and antivirus must be kept up to date.
- all security features such as multi-factor authentication (MFA) should be enabled.
- a secure internet should be used when possible. Ideally, a Virtual Private Network (VPN) should be used.
- public WiFi should be avoided.



Health providers may also need to use their own devices. The use of personal devices to support video conferencing for consultations, mobile messaging and home working is acceptable where there is no practical alternative. Reasonable security steps should be made, including setting a strong device and app password and only using secure and encrypted tools and apps.

Personal/confidential patient information should not be stored on any device. If you take any physical documents home with you that contain personal/confidential patient information, you should ensure the security of these documents at home and when travelling.

Information should be safely transferred to the appropriate health and care record as soon as it is practical to do so.

## Further Resources

Further resources are under development and will be available on

[www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz) and

[www.healthnavigator.co.nz/telehealth](http://www.healthnavigator.co.nz/telehealth)

## Contact

Please email [help@telehealth.org.nz](mailto:help@telehealth.org.nz)