# RACGP Template – Telehealth video consultation information for patients

Telehealth video consultations are an alternative option to physical consultations. While in some situations a physical consultation will be preferred, there are many scenarios where a telehealth video consultation will enable more convenient and accessible healthcare delivery without compromising patient safety.

A telehealth video consultation involves a specialist or consultant physician attending to the patient, and can include another medical practitioner, a participating optometrist, a participating nurse practitioner, a participating midwife, practice nurse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner or Aboriginal health worker providing support at the patient end.

It is recommended you establish whether you and your patient meet the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) requirements, prior to engaging with a specialist.

Geographic eligibility for telehealth services funded under Medicare are determined according to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Area (ASGC-RA) classifications. Telehealth Eligible Areas are those areas that are outside a Major City (RA1) according to ASGC-RA (RA2-5). Patients and providers are able to check their eligibility by following the links on the MBS website ([www.mbsonline.gov.au/telehealth](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/telehealth)).

There is a requirement for the patient and specialist to be located a minimum of 15km apart at the time of the consultation.

Residents of eligible Residential Aged Care Facilities and patients of eligible Aboriginal Medical Services in all areas of Australia are eligible for specialist video consultations under Medicare.

This template will help you prepare your own patient information brochure. The template covers many aspects of telehealth video consultations including:

* what to prepare for a telehealth video consultation
* who will be present
* Medicare rebates and eligibility
* privacy of telehealth video consultations.

You can adapt the sections in red text and other areas of the template as required to suit the specific needs of your individual general practice.

The explanatory notes provide additional information and context on why a particular section is important.

Your final template does not necessarily need to include these explanatory notes.

Further information on telehealth video consultations is available on the [RACGP website](http://www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/ehealth/telehealth/).

[insert practice name] telehealth video consultation information for patients

*Explanatory notes:* Practices are invited to adapt the template on suitable practice stationery to create their own patient information brochure.

What is a telehealth video consultation?

A telehealth video consultation is a consultation between a patient and their GP (or practice nurse/Aboriginal health worker) at one location and a specialist located at another location.

Advantages of telehealth video consultations

Every patient’s situation is different but in general, the benefits of this service include:

* improved access to specialist care
* reduced waiting time to see your specialist
* reduced travel time and costs
* reduced absence from work.

How can I have a telehealth video consultation with my specialist?

To have a telehealth video consultation with your specialist, you must be referred by your GP and the clinicians must consider it safe and suitable for you. Not all specialists offer telehealth video consultations – your GP will discuss options with you.

Do I have to participate in a telehealth video consultation?

No. You are able to attend a face-to-face consultation with your specialist if you prefer. A telehealth video consultation will only happen if your clinicians consider it safe and suitable and you are happy to participate in a telehealth video consultation.

Where are the telehealth video consultations provided?

You can participate in a telehealth video consultation from our practice.

Who will arrange the telehealth video consultation?

We have a telehealth video consultation coordinator who arranges telehealth video consultations with specialists.

What if I need to cancel my appointment?

Telehealth video consultations require a lot of coordination at our end and at the specialist’s end so please try to keep your telehealth video consultation appointment. If you need to cancel, please let us know immediately, because rescheduling telehealth video consultations is more complicated than rescheduling a face-to-face appointment.

How should I prepare for a telehealth video consultation appointment?

You can help get the best from a telehealth video consultation by following these simple steps:

* arrive at least 15 minutes early to allow for preparation time
* avoid wearing brightly patterned or reflective clothing as this may not show up well on camera
* switch your mobile off or to silent mode
* speak clearly so your voice can be picked up by the microphone
* look at the camera so you can achieve good eye contact with the specialist
* if you have a question or need help during the telehealth video consultation, just ask.

What happens at the telehealth video consultation appointment?

You and a support clinician from our practice and the distant specialist will be on a TV/video or computer screen at each end of the telehealth video consultation.

At the start of the consultation everyone will introduce themselves and the reason for the consultation will be explained. You will be asked some identifying questions such as your name, address, and date of birth to make sure the right patient, right doctors and right health records are present. The specialist will speak with you and ask you questions in the same way as they would at a face-to-face consultation.

Who will be present?

You, your GP and the specialist.

As with a face-to-face appointment, your spouse, partner, family or friend may accompany you if you wish.

What if I want to have a private discussion with my specialist?

You may ask your GP (or another support clinician from our team) to step out of the telehealth video consultation at any time if you wish to have a private discussion with the specialist and they will do so provided they think your safety is not at risk.

How private is the telehealth video consultation?

The same privacy and confidentiality requirements that apply to face-to-face consultations apply to telehealth video consultations.

What if I need to be examined?

The specialist may ask your GP or support clinician to examine you on their behalf. This may or may not be on camera. We will respect your privacy and a private area or gown will be provided if you need to remove clothing for an examination.

What if I have special needs?

If you have special needs such as an interpreter or a wheelchair, please let our telehealth video consultation coordinator know and they will make a note of these when your consultation with the specialist is confirmed.

Will the telehealth video consultation be recorded?

No. Our practice does not record telehealth video consultations and we do not give patients permission to make their own recordings of a telehealth video consultation. If your specialist or your GP thinks it would be helpful for your treatment to record particular images during your telehealth video consultation, they would first seek your written permission to do so and they would ask you to repeat your consent on camera.

*Explanatory notes:* The RACGP recommends that general practices adopt a default position of not recording telehealth video consultations, and not authorising patients to make their own recordings of video consultations.

In accordance with the recognised principle of only collecting health information that is necessary, a decision to record images during a telehealth video consultation would generally be made by a clinician on the basis of collecting only the information that is clinically necessary for managing a patient. In the same way that a physical consultation is not normally recorded, it is not anticipated that a video consultation would be recorded.

Where a video recording is made, the practice needs to meet community expectations and legal requirements to protect patient privacy. Clinicians need to be mindful of their own privacy in relation to the risk of video recordings being redistributed in the public domain without their consent. Since these scenarios can be problematic and have unintended consequences for all parties, it is suggested that recording be reserved for exceptional circumstances where it is absolutely clinically necessary.

What if I feel I can’t continue?

Most patients feel a little nervous at the beginning of their first telehealth video consultation because it’s a new way of seeing a doctor. However, most patients soon feel very comfortable with this kind of consultation. It’s very unlikely you’ll feel unable to continue with a telehealth video consultation. If this does happen, you can leave although consultation fees may still apply.

How much will it cost?

Generally, you will receive two bills for the telehealth video consultation – one from your general practice and one from the distant specialist. Our normal billing process will apply.

If there are likely to be any other fees associated with the telehealth video consultation, we will let you know in advance.

Am I eligible for a Medicare rebate?

Medicare rebates for telehealth video consultations are available to patients from remote and regional areas, as well as patients of residential aged care facilities or Aboriginal health services anywhere in Australia. If you fall into one of these patient categories and are privately billed, you will be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

There is a requirement for the patient and specialist to be located at least 15km apart, at the time of the consultation.

How can I provide feedback on my telehealth video consultation?

We are keen to get your feedback so we can continue to improve our video consultation services. Our reception staff will be able to provide you with a patient feedback form. We will ask for your permission to share your feedback anonymously with other healthcare professionals and our practice team. You can choose for your feedback to remain confidential.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about whether a telehealth video consultation may be suitable for you, please talk to your GP.

If you have any general questions about how telehealth video consultations work, please talk to our telehealth video consultation coordinator.

Where can I get more general information about telehealth video consultations?

**For more information about patient eligibility and payments**

Contact Medicare Australia

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au/health-professionals/services/medicare/mbs-and-telehealth

Phone: 1800 222 032

Email: [telehealth@medicareaustralia.gov.au](mailto:telehealth@medicareaustralia.gov.au)

**MBS online – Connecting Health Services With the Future: Overview for Patients**

[www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/mbsonline-telehealth-landing.htm](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/mbsonline-telehealth-landing.htm)

**MBS online – Connecting Health Services With the Future: Questions and Answers for Patients**

[www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/connectinghealthservices-patients-QA](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/connectinghealthservices-patients-QA)

Disclaimer

The information set out in this publication is © The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2017 and current at the date of first publication. Permission is granted to general practices to adapt and reproduce the information in any medium.

The information is intended for use as a guide of a general nature only and may or may not be relevant to particular practices or circumstances. Nor is this publication exhaustive of the subject matter. Persons implementing any recommendations contained in this publication must exercise their own independent skill or judgment or seek appropriate professional advice relevant to their own particular circumstances when so doing. Compliance with any recommendations cannot of itself guarantee discharge of the duty of care owed to patients and others coming into contact with the health professional and the premises from which the health professional operates.

While the text is directed to health professionals possessing appropriate qualifications and skills in ascertaining and discharging their professional (including legal) duties, it is not to be regarded as clinical advice and, in particular, is no substitute for a full examination and consideration of medical history in reaching a diagnosis and treatment based on accepted clinical practices.

Accordingly The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and its employees and agents shall have no liability (including without limitation liability by reason of negligence) to any users of the information contained in this publication for any loss or damage (consequential or otherwise), cost or expense incurred or arising by reason of any person using or relying on the information contained in this publication and whether caused by reason of any error, negligent act, omission or misrepresentation in the information.