

# Things to remember about Telehealth implementation during COVID lockdown

Since 2012, the New Zealand Telehealth Forum (NZTF) has been providing free guidance and resources for the implementation of telehealth within New Zealand. During the COVID pandemic the NZTF have increased our support of Clinicians across the motu to supply healthcare safely by video and other telehealth mediums. This support has taken the form of direct advice, webinars, resources and assisting the MoH and the MCNZ with advice to remove barriers.

With level four upon us once more, there are a lot of lessons from previous lockdowns that you can use to support you and your patients this time around. Information on anything telehealth related, can be found on the Telehealth Resource Centre [www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz) and some of your questions that may be top-of-mind are addressed below:

## 1. Video consults – give it a go

There are lots of benefits of utilising video as a medium for telehealth. These include:

- Allows a patient and clinician to see and talk to each other even though they are in different locations
- Suitable for Patients/Provider that are self-isolating and cannot come into the practice.
- Increases patient access by avoiding travel and waiting time
- Video allows more accurate transfer of clinical information than telephone consultation
- It can allow many to many rather than one to one – whanau support or Specialist advice and support with the patient and the GP/Nurse
- Greater efficiencies – for patient and clinician to come together and being seen by the right clinician at the right time [2]
- Start with familiar technology, ensuring that security and privacy are considered in the implementation.

Aspects to consider include:

- o Technology: [www.telehealth.org.nz/tech](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/tech)
- o Security: [www.telehealth.org.nz/tech/security](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/tech/security)
- o Privacy and Confidentiality:  
[www.telehealth.org.nz/privacy](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/privacy)
- o Regulations:  
[www.telehealth.org.nz/standards](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/standards)

## 2. Recording of consultations

This should only occur with the consent of both parties. There should be a transparent conversation and consent given and confirmed. [2]



### 3. Medicolegal concerns

When providing health care services through telehealth there are a number of things you should pay attention to:

- a) ensuring you have the patient's informed consent to provide the consultation via telehealth, including preparing the patient to have a physical exam if necessary (make sure that you make it clear if this will carry an extra cost)
- b) providing treatment if you are unfamiliar with the patient, this should only be done if you have access to the notes or if there is a high degree of urgency.
- c) confirming a patient's identity and medical history
- d) Prescribing where possible should be through NZePS, however there is a waiver for prescriptions to not require a physical signature until September 18. All prescriptions should be transferred securely.

Please refer to the Medical Council statement on telehealth for further information:

[www.mcnz.org.nz/assets/standards/c1a69ec6b5/Statement-on-telehealth.pdf](http://www.mcnz.org.nz/assets/standards/c1a69ec6b5/Statement-on-telehealth.pdf)

### 4. Connectivity

At the beginning of a session, ensure that patient contact details are up to date. If there are connectivity issues during the session, i.e., a video consult is interrupted by poor WiFi connection, then consider calling the patient to continue the session.



### 5. Remuneration for professional services via telehealth

Patients should expect to be charged the same as for an equivalent in-person consultation. [1, 2]

### 6. Patient access to technology (data, device, digital literacy)

There is a very high acceptance from patients that have participated in a telehealth consultation by video, 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.

However, up to 20% of the population, 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. [2]

Pilots and some projects have been funded and are underway to explore how to address some of the inequity of access that the digital divide has created. Some of these studies include:

- Digifale – Digital literacy in Pacific communities
- Pokapu o te Taiwhenua Network Project - virtual network of health and wellbeing community providers, community members, primary care, and specialists
- Community telehealth hubs – located throughout the community.
- More projects can be found on the National Telehealth Register:  
[www.telehealth.org.nz/nationaltelehealthregister](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/nationaltelehealthregister)

## 7. How do we keep up with telehealth in New Zealand?

It is best to sign up to our newsletter at [www.telehealth.org.nz/newsletter](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/newsletter). We promise not to fill up your inbox every day, we will send occasional news and updates to you

We welcome the opportunity to support New Zealand and Australia's medical colleges in their activities that involve Telehealth. This includes providing reviewers for policy documents and speakers as required. The NZTLG are currently supporting the development of Telehealth core competency modules which will be free of charge to anyone who would like to access them and we welcome discussions on how to enable CME/MOPs points to be captured within these modules.

### Further useful links:

1. RNZCGP position on telehealth: [www.rnzcgp.org.nz/RNZCGP/Advocacy/Position\\_statements/Telehealth.aspx](http://www.rnzcgp.org.nz/RNZCGP/Advocacy/Position_statements/Telehealth.aspx)
2. Telehealth Resources: [www.telehealth.org.nz](http://www.telehealth.org.nz)
3. To access further free support please join here: [www.telehealth.org.nz/join](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/join)
4. Previous COVID information from NZTF: [www.telehealth.org.nz/covid1](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/covid1)

### Works Cited:

- [1] Healthcare Home Collaborative , “Video consults toolkit,” [Online]. Available: [www.healthcarehome.org.nz/download/video-consults-toolkit-20-march-2020-v1-compressed.pdf?inline](http://www.healthcarehome.org.nz/download/video-consults-toolkit-20-march-2020-v1-compressed.pdf?inline) [Accessed August 2021].
- [2] NZ Telehealth Forum and Resource Centre, “Health Provider,” [Online]. Available: [www.telehealth.org.nz/health-provider](http://www.telehealth.org.nz/health-provider)

