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TELEHEALTH SERVICES RESTORED TO MEET PANDEMIC DEMAND

The AMA says the temporary expansion of telehealth services announced by the Government will benefit many Australians who need to see their doctor during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said Health Minister Greg Hunt and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg have today endorsed AMA proposals to restore expanded patient access to telehealth.

“The AMA welcomes the six-month return to the telehealth rules used earlier in the pandemic. COVID-19 positive patients and other patients wanting to see their doctor will now have better access to medical treatment by phone or video,” Dr Khorshid said.

Dr Khorshid thanked the Government for putting into effect key elements of the telehealth plan he, and leaders of other peak general practice groups, put to Minister Hunt last Wednesday.

“GPs will be able to bill Medicare for telehealth MBS Level C consultations, meaning they can spend more time on a greater range of patient needs via telehealth.

“Other private specialists will also be able to use telehealth once again to conduct relevant consultations with patients by phone or video, saving patients having to travel.

“Medicare compliance activities will also be moderated, recognising that doctors will use more telehealth as more patients are COVID positive, isolating or just being COVID-cautious.”

Dr Khorshid said COVID-19 patient demand on general practice was yet to peak, with many medical practices forced to triage and care for COVID positive patients on top of usual patient care. He said more help from government was needed for medical practices to care for markedly increased health needs of the community.

“The surge in Omicron infection is seeing patients reaching out to general practice like never before. Many practices are struggling to answer all the phone calls they are receiving and provide the care that is required of their patients.

“With political leaders focused on ICU and hospital admissions, there is no easy way to measure COVID demand on GPs,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The AMA also welcomes the announcement that over 20 million units of PPE will be provided for primary care for GPs and pharmacists over the next three months, to be prioritised for rural, regional and remote areas. However, while this is an important start, the need is immediate and GPs and pharmacists in metropolitan areas are also desperate for PPE.

“To keep their doors open, GPs across the country need more support from Government. As we approach the COVID-patient peak and beyond the AMA will continue to work with the Federal Government to progress this,” Dr Khorshid said.

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