



Additional 10 MBS Mental Health Sessions during COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Consumers

What is the Australian Government doing to support people impacted by COVID-19?

The Australian Government recognises the mental health impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on individuals and communities, particularly those in areas where additional public health orders have been issued to stop the spread of the virus.

Building on existing support, the *Better Access Pandemic Support Measure* will provide 10 additional Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions for people subject to further restrictions in areas impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is eligible to access the 10 additional sessions?

The additional sessions are for people who have already used their 10 individual Better Access sessions in the calendar year, and who are:

- in areas subject to public health orders restricting their movement within a state or territory issued at any time from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021; or
- required to isolate or quarantine under public health orders for at least 14 days.

You can find information on eligible areas and the public health orders or directions for each state and territory by visiting the [Department of Health's website](#).

How do I access these sessions?

If you are eligible, you will need to see your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician for a review and referral to access the additional 10 sessions (sessions 11- 20). Your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician will determine whether you will benefit from additional support.

You are able to access the additional 10 sessions once only between the period 7 August 2020 until 31 March 2021.

Do I need a new Mental Health Treatment Plan to access the additional 10 sessions?

No, you do not need a *new* Mental Health Treatment Plan to access the additional 10 sessions but you do need to have an *existing* Mental Health Treatment Plan. If you already have a Mental Health Treatment Plan, see the 'How do I access these sessions?' for further information.

What if I don't have a Mental Health Treatment Plan?

If you don't have a Mental Health Treatment Plan then you will need to discuss this with your GP. Your GP can determine if you need a Mental Health Treatment Plan. If your GP gives you a Mental Health Treatment Plan then you can access the existing Better Access Services.

What services are available *without* a Mental Health Treatment Plan?

A range of other mental health services and supports are available to people during the pandemic which do not require you to have a Mental Health Treatment Plan.

Beyond Blue established a 24/7 phone counselling service (1800 512 348). This service is staffed by accredited mental health professionals to help people experiencing stress or anxiety associated with the impacts of the pandemic such as health concerns, employment changes, business closures or family pressures. You can find further information about the Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service by visiting coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au or calling the phone counselling service line.

You may also like to consider using digital services. Digital services can be used to complement, or as an alternative to, face-to-face therapies allowing you to seek support in times of need, or when and where most convenient. The Government's digital mental health gateway, Head to Health, is a consumer-friendly website that aims to help people more easily access information, advice and free or low cost phone and online counselling, treatment and crisis support. Head to Health is available at headtohealth.gov.au.

I had a review after six sessions. Do I need another review to access these sessions?

Yes, you will need to see your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician for a review and referral to access the additional 10 sessions (sessions 11- 20) even if you had a review after six sessions. Your GP will determine whether you will benefit from additional support.

Can I access additional group sessions?

No, this new measure is for individual psychological services only.

Can I receive sessions via telehealth?

You can access these services face-to-face until 31 March 2021.

Alternatively, you can access services via telehealth (video) and phone. Consistent with COVID-19 temporary MBS telehealth items, telehealth and phone items are currently available until 30 September 2020.

What happens if I haven't used up all my additional 10 sessions before 31 March 2021?

The MBS items are temporary and cannot be accessed after 31 March 2021.

Can I still access the additional 10 sessions if the public health orders in my area change?

Yes, the additional sessions are for people who have already used their 10 Better Access sessions in the calendar year and who are:

- in an area subject to public health orders restricting their movement within a state or territory issued at any time from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021; or
- required to isolate or quarantine under public health orders for at least 14 days.

I am not in a lockdown area but am required to isolate. Can I still access these services?

While a number of areas within Victoria are subject to specific directions which restrict movement within the State, other state/territory public health orders restrict movement under a variety of circumstances rather than identifying specific localities.

For example, NSW residents may be eligible to receive services if they are required to quarantine or self-isolate under a state or territory public health order or direction including where a person:

- has a confirmed positive COVID-19 test requiring them to quarantine for 14 days by a public health order; or
- must self-isolate due to being a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case by a public health order;
- is a returning Australian citizen from overseas in quarantine; or
- must self-isolate or quarantine in accordance with a public health order after returning from another Australian state/territory.

You can find information on eligible areas and the public health orders or directions for each state and territory by visiting the [Department of Health's website](#).

Can I access the additional 10 sessions if I live in the border zone between New South Wales and Victoria?

Under the NSW Government Public Health (COVID-19 Border Control) Order 2020 there are special conditions in place for people living in border zones and for people returning to NSW after entering Victoria for certain medical or hospital services. Where border zone residents have used their 10 individual sessions under Better Access and are required to self-isolate due to the operation of this, or any other public health order, you would also be eligible for the additional 10 individual Better Access sessions.

How does this measure relate to the new Better Access Bushfire items?

This new measure is separate from the Better Access Bushfire Recovery items. You can access both the bushfire items and these new items if you are eligible, noting that each has its own separate eligibility.

How do the COVID-19 Better Access items differ from the Better Access Bushfire Recovery items?

The Better Access Bushfire Recovery items were put in place to support those who had suffered trauma resulting from being in a bushfire impacted area. For this reason, a mental health treatment plan and referral was not required to be in place and developed by a GP. While people that suffer traumatic events can benefit from psychological therapies to support recovery, trauma itself is not a mental illness.

The COVID-19 Better Access items are different. They are intended to support people with a diagnosed mental illness who need additional treatment and support.

Why is the measure not available to all Australians?

This is a targeted response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This measure recognises the impact various public health orders or directions issued from 1 July 2020 and designed to stop the spread of COVID-19, have on people with diagnosed mental health conditions.

Why have mental health nurses and counsellors not been given access to these new MBS items?

Provider eligibility access for this measure aligns with current arrangements under the existing *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS* initiative.