



Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 pandemic response – primary care

The Australian Government is extending two primary care initiatives critical to the pandemic response – with total investments in Medicare-subsidised telehealth (\$2.4billion) and General Practitioner (GP) led respiratory clinics (\$377.5 million). Both are extended to 31 March 2021.

The Government has moved quickly to build the capacity of the health, aged care and broader care workforce with up-to-date training in infection prevention and control and for a surge in demand. The pandemic has fast-tracked the delivery of telehealth in Australia. Video and phone consultations are now available for GP, nursing, midwifery, allied health and mental health services and for essential specialist services, such as consultant physician, geriatrician, and neurosurgery services. The Government is developing options for the permanent adoption of telehealth beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This Budget will fund work to begin system changes to support future reform (\$18.6 million).

Our world-leading testing is supported by a network of up to 150 GP-led respiratory clinics, which complement state run fever clinics. As well, free testing at the point of care will continue in 86 rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Why is this important?

Telehealth and frontline testing for COVID-19 are key elements in the Government's strategy to slow the spread of the virus. Extending telehealth services gives people continued access to essential health services in their home. Maintaining GP-led respiratory clinics conserves the capacity of public hospitals and general practice. Point-of-care testing enables early identification of cases, and allows local health services to respond quickly and decisively if COVID-19 is detected. A surge workforce, coupled with up-to-date infection prevention and control training to the health, aged care and broader care workforce, is critical, particularly for vulnerable Australians and frontline health workers.

These measures are informed by, and support, the Government's Coronavirus National Health Plan, to ensure Australians have the support they need throughout this pandemic and that we remain prepared across the country.

Who will benefit?

This extended response will continue to protect all Australians, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with chronic conditions and Indigenous communities, from COVID-19.

How much will this cost?

This will cost \$2.8 billion from 2019–20 to 2020–21.