



Australian Government
Department of Health

ASKMBS ADVISORY

Updated August 2021

MBS COVID-19 telehealth ‘existing relationship’ requirement—Clarification of exemptions

This information is accurate as of 17 August 2021 and may change in response to circumstances.

MBS COVID-19 MBS TELEHEALTH 'EXISTING RELATIONSHIP' REQUIREMENT – CLARIFICATION OF EXEMPTIONS

As of 20 July 2020, GPs, as well as other medical practitioners (OMPs) working in general practice, must only perform a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) COVID-19 telehealth service where they have an existing relationship with the patient (see definition below). As outlined in this advisory, there are exemptions from this requirement for specific patient groups and MBS items.

Previously, a key exemption was for people in a 'COVID-19 impacted area', defined as an area where a person's movement is restricted by a State or Territory public health requirement that applies to the person's location. From **16 July 2021**, the test for exempting patients who have their movement restricted by a State and Territory public health order will be replaced with three separate criteria:

- the patient is in COVID-19 isolation because of a State or Territory public health order; or
- the patient is in COVID-19 quarantine because of a State or Territory public health order; or
- the patient is located in an COVID-19 hotspot as declared by the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer.

What is 'COVID-19 isolation'?

A person with COVID-19 or suspected to have it must enter mandatory isolation.

What is 'COVID-19 quarantine'?

When a person is well but may have been in contact with someone with COVID-19, they are required to isolate from other people to prevent the spread of the virus. The quarantine period is 14 days from when they may have been in contact with the virus.

What is a Commonwealth-declared hotspot?

The list of hotspots declared by the Chief Medical Officer is currently available on [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au).

The new arrangements mean, for example, that a person who:

- is not in isolation or quarantine under a public health order, and
- is in a location that is in lockdown, but is not a Commonwealth-declared hotspot, and
- is able to leave their home to access medical treatment,

is not exempt from the existing relationship requirement.

DEFINITION OF 'EXISTING RELATIONSHIP'

An 'existing relationship' is defined as:

- the medical practitioner who performs the service has provided a face-to-face service (that was billed to Medicare) to the patient in the last 12 months; or
- the medical practitioner who performs the service is located at a medical practice, and the patient has a face-to-face service at that practice in the last 12 months. This can be a service performed by another doctor located at the practice, or a service performed by another health professional located at the practice (such as a practice nurse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker); or
- the medical practitioner who performs the service is a participant in the Approved Medical Deputising Service program, and the Approved Medical Deputising Service provider that employs the medical practitioner has a formal agreement with a medical practice that has provided at least one face-to-face service to the patient in the last 12 months.

Where a practice comprises more than one site, GPs and OMPs employed by the practice who have a provider number for all sites, and regularly practice at all sites, can provide a telehealth service to a patient who has been seen face-to-face at any of the practice's sites within the previous 12 months.

EXEMPTION STATUS UNDER SPECIFIC SCENARIOS

To assist practitioners in assessing a patient's exemption eligibility, the following examples are provided. Providers of Medicare services should monitor www.mbsonline.gov.au for further developments. For further assistance, please contact askmbs@health.gov.au.

Scenario	Would this person be exempt?
Patient diagnosed with COVID-19 who is isolating at home	Yes
Returned Medicare-eligible overseas traveller in hotel quarantine, whose health care is not being provided by a State or Territory Government	Yes
Person who has entered another state with border restrictions who is required to self-isolate upon arrival	Yes
Close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case who has been directed to quarantine	Yes
Close contact of a possible or suspected COVID-19 case (e.g. passengers on a flight with non-quarantined overseas travellers)	Yes
Patient with symptoms of COVID-19 who has not yet been tested	No
Patient who has been tested for COVID-19 and is awaiting their result	Yes
Patient who has a chronic health condition/is immunocompromised	No
Patient who is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not in isolation or quarantine under a public health order; and in a location that is in lockdown, but is not a Commonwealth-declared hotspot; and able to leave their home to access medical treatment. 	No
GP who has a chronic health condition/is immunocompromised i.e. exempt as a provider?	No

SPECIFIC EXEMPTION CATEGORIES

Under legislation, the existing relationship requirement does not apply to:

- children under the age of 12 months;
- patients who are homeless;
- patients living in a COVID-19 impacted area;
- patients receiving an urgent after-hours (unsociable hours) service (under Subgroup 29 of MBS Group A40);
- patients who are seeking assistance with smoking cessation (under Subgroups 1, 2 and 3 of MBS Group A45);

- patients of medical practitioners at an Aboriginal Medical Service or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service; or
- from 10 March 2021, patients in a flood-affected area.

From 1 July 2021, patients accessing specific MBS items for:

- blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health consultations (under Subgroups 39 and 40 of MBS Group A40); or
- pregnancy counselling services (under Subgroups 15 and 16 of MBS Group A40).

From 21 July 2021, patients accessing specific MBS items for:

- mental health planning and treatment services (focussed psychological strategies services under Subgroups 3, 10, 19 and 20 of Group A40);
- eating disorder planning and treatment services (under Subgroups 21, 25, 26, 27 and 28 of MBS Group A40); or
- items 93301, 93302, 93304, 93305, 93307, 93308, 93310, 93311, 93404 to 93411 and 93435 to 93442 (under MBS Groups A41 and A42).

A person who is experiencing homelessness means a person who does not have suitable accommodation alternatives. They are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations.

A person in a flood-affected area is a person who, at the time of accessing a telehealth service, is living in a local government area that is declared by a State or Territory Government to be a natural disaster area due to flood. People in these areas can access telehealth services from any GP or OMP.

A complete list of exempt items is at Appendix A.

There are no exemptions for specific providers or new practices. Patients seeking to maintain their access to telehealth services who have not received a face-to-face service in the past 12 months are encouraged to do so.

The existing relationship requirement is to ensure patients continue to receive quality, ongoing care from a GP or OMP who knows their medical history and needs. The requirement responds to advice from medical experts, such as the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

NEW LONGER TELEPHONE CONSULTATION ITEMS

From 16 July 2021, two new GP and OMP telephone consultation items are available to provide an increased Medicare benefit for patients who are located in an area declared as a COVID-19 hotspot by the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer or are subject to a COVID-19 State or Territory public health order that requires the person to be in isolation or quarantine. The list of hotspots declared by the Chief Medical Officer is currently available on [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au).

The new items, 92746 for GPs and 92747 for OMPs, enable medical practitioners to provide longer telephone consultations, lasting 20 minutes or more. The new items are exempt from the 'existing relationship' requirement and are only available to patients who at the time of receiving the services are in a Commonwealth declared COVID-19 hotspot or required to isolate

or quarantine because of a COVID-19 State or Territory public health order. The definitions of 'COVID-19 isolation' and 'COVID-19 quarantine' are given above.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS AND ASSOCIATED SERVICES

The Australian Government is committed to offering every person in Australia access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines at no cost.

The government has introduced a number of new items to support the provision of the vaccine to Australians in this manner, including vaccine suitability assessment items, in-depth assessment items, and flag fall fees.

These items are free to patients, must be bulk-billed, and cannot be linked to or be contingent on any other fee or service. Providers are not to charge out of pocket expenses to Medicare eligible or ineligible patients.

Further information about support for providers and patients for the COVID-19 vaccine roll out can be found here: [MBS online - FAQ - Bulk Billed MBS patient COVID-19 Vaccine Suitability Assessment Service](#)

Appendix A

MBS COVID-19 telehealth (video) and telephone items exempt from the 'existing relationship' requirement

Subject to specific item requirements, these items can be provided to any Medicare-eligible patient in any location. The corresponding face-to-face items have been included, where applicable, for reference. Some item descriptors have been truncated. Full item descriptors, Schedule fees, Medicare benefits and explanatory notes can be viewed by searching MBS Online for the item number at www.mbsonline.gov.au

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Group A40 - COVID-19 services			
Subgroup 3 (telehealth) & 10 (phone) - COVID-19 focussed psychological strategies (FPS) services			
Focussed Psychological Strategies (FPS) treatment, lasting at least 30 minutes, but less than 40 minutes - GP	2721 & 2729	91818	91842
FPS treatment, at least 40 minutes - GP	2725 & 2731	91819	91843
Focussed Psychological Strategies (FPS) treatment, lasting at least 30 minutes, but less than 40 minutes - OMP	283 & 371	91820	91844
FPS treatment, at least 40 minutes - OMP	286 & 372	91821	91845
Subgroup 15 (telehealth) & 16 (phone)- COVID-19 GP pregnancy support counselling			
Non-directive pregnancy support counselling, at least 20 minutes GP	4001	92136	92138
Non-directive pregnancy support counselling of at least 20 minutes OMP	792	92137	92139
Subgroup 19 (telehealth) & 20 (phone) - COVID-19 GP mental health treatment plans			
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	2700	92112	-
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	2701	92113	-
Review of a GP mental health treatment plan or psychiatrist assessment and management plan	2712	92114	92126
Mental health treatment consultation, at least 20 minutes	2713	92115	92127
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	2715	92116	-
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	2717	92117	-
Medical practitioner without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	272	92118	-

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Medical Practitioner without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	276	92119	-
Review of a GP mental health treatment plan or Psychiatrist Assessment and Management Plan	277	92120	92132
Medical Practitioner mental health treatment consultation, at least 20 minutes	279	92121	92133
Medical Practitioner with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	281	92122	-
Medical Practitioner with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	282	92123	-
Subgroup 21 - COVID-19 GP eating disorder treatment and management plan – Telehealth service			
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90250	92146	-
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90251	92147	-
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90252	92148	-
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90253	92149	-
Medical practitioner without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90254	92150	-
Medical practitioner without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90255	92151	-
Medical practitioner with mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90256	92152	-
Medical practitioner with mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90257	92153	-
Subgroups 25 (telehealth) & 26 (phone) - COVID-19 review of an eating disorder plan			
Review of an eating disorder treatment and management plan	90264	92170	92176
Review of an eating disorder treatment and management plan	90265	92171	92177
Subgroups 27 (telehealth) & 28 (phone) COVID-19 GP eating disorder focussed psychological strategies			

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Eating disorder psychological treatment (EDPT) service, lasting at least 30 minutes, but less than 40 minutes - GP	90271	92182	92194
EDPT service, at least 40 minutes - GP	90273	92184	92196
Eating disorders psychological treatment (EDPT) service, lasting at least 30 minutes, but less than 40 minutes OMP	90275	92186	92198
EDPT service, at least 40 minutes - OMP	90277	92188	92200
Subgroup 29 - COVID-19 GP and other medical practitioner - Urgent after-hours service in unsociable hours - Telehealth service			
Urgent attendance, unsociable after-hours - GP	599	92210	-
Urgent attendance, unsociable after-hours - OMP	600	92211	-
Subgroups 39 (telehealth) & 40 (phone) - GP sexual and reproductive health consultation			
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of not more than 5 minutes	-	92715	92731
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of not more than 5 minutes	-	92716	92732
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of not more than 5 minutes. Modified Monash 2-7 area	-	92717	92733
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of more than 5 minutes in duration but not more than 20 minutes - GP	-	92718	92734
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of more than 5 minutes in duration but not more than 20 minutes - OMP	-	92719	92735
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of more than 5 minutes in duration but not more than 20 minutes. Modified Monash 2-7 area - OMP	-	92720	92736
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of more than 20 minutes in duration but not more than 40 minutes - GP	-	92721	92737
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner of more than 20 minutes in duration but not more than 40 minutes - OMP	-	92722	92738
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general	-	92723	92739

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
practitioner of more than 20 minutes in duration but not more than 40 minutes. Modified Monash 2-7 area - OMP			
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner lasting at least 40 minutes in duration - GP	-	92724	92740
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner lasting at least 40 minutes in duration OMP	-	92725	92741
Professional attendance for the provision of services related to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health by a general practitioner lasting at least 40 minutes in duration. Modified Monash 2-7 area - OMP	-	92726	92742
Subgroup 41 - COVID-19 impacted general practice phone services			
Phone attendance by a general practitioner lasting at least 20 minutes in duration, if; (a) the service is performed on: (i) a person who is in a COVID-19 Commonwealth declared hotspot; or (ii) a person who is in COVID-19 isolation because of a State or Territory public health order; or (iii) a person who is in COVID-19 quarantine because of a State or Territory public health order; and (b) the attendance includes any of the following that are clinically relevant: (i) taking a detailed patient history; (ii) arranging any necessary investigation; (iii) implementing a management plan; (iv) providing appropriate preventative health care	-	-	92746
Phone attendance by a medical practitioner (not including a general practitioner, specialist or consultant physician) lasting at least 20 minutes in duration, if: (a) the service is performed on: (i) a person who is in a COVID-19 Commonwealth declared hotspot; or (ii) a person who is in COVID-19 isolation because of a State or Territory public health order; or (iii) a person who is in COVID-19 quarantine because of a State or Territory public health order; and (b) the attendance includes any of the following that are clinically relevant: (i) taking a detailed patient history; (ii) arranging any necessary investigation; (iii) implementing a management plan; (iv) providing appropriate preventative health care	-	-	92747

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Group A41 - COVID-19 additional focussed psychological strategies services			
Subgroup 1 - GP additional focussed psychological strategies services			
GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services	93300	93301	93302
GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services	93303	93304	93305
OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services	93306	93307	93308
OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services	93309	93310	93311

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Group A42 - Mental health planning for care recipients of a residential aged care facility			
Subgroup 1 - GP mental health treatment plans for care recipients of a residential aged care facility			
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed) 20-40 minutes – GP	93400	93404	93408
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed) 40 plus minutes – GP	93401	93405	93409
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed) 20- 40 minutes – GP	93402	93406	93410
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed) 40 plus minutes - GP	93403	93407	93411
Subgroup 3 - Non specialist practitioner mental health treatment plans (MHTPs) for care recipients of a residential aged care facility			
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed) 20-40 minutes – GP	93431	93435	93439
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed) 40 plus minutes – GP	93432	93436	93440
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed) 20- 40 minutes – GP	93433	93437	93441
Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed) 40 plus minutes - GP	93434	93438	93442

Service	Face-to-face items	Telehealth items <i>Via video-conference</i>	Telephone items
Group A45 – Nicotine and smoking cessation counselling			
Subgroups 1, 2 &3 – GP and OMP smoking cessation services			
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a general practitioner at consulting rooms lasting less than 20 minutes.	93680	93690	93700
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a medical practitioner (not including a general practitioner, specialist or consultant physician) at consulting rooms lasting less than 20 minutes.	93681	93691	93701
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a medical practitioner (not including a general practitioner, specialist or consultant physician) at consulting rooms, in an eligible area, lasting less than 20 minutes.	93682	93692	93702
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a general practitioner at consulting rooms lasting at least 20 minutes and must include any of the following:	93683	93693	93703
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a medical practitioner (not including a general practitioner, specialist or consultant physician) at consulting rooms lasting at least 20 minutes.	93684	93694	93704
Professional attendance for nicotine and smoking cessation counselling, care and advice by a medical practitioner (not including a general practitioner, specialist or consultant physician) at consulting rooms, in an eligible area, lasting at least 20 minutes.	93685	93695	93705