Connecting Health Services With the Future: Technology and Technical Issues for Telehealth

From 1 July 2011, Medicare and DVA Rebates and Financial Incentives will be available for telehealth under the *Connecting Health Services With the Future* initiative. This page contains information on clinical practice and technology for telehealth

Page last updated: 05 June 2011

Telehealth is a new way of practising for most medical practitioners, and it presents new clinical and technological challenges.  
  
There is a wide range of technology available to support video conferencing. While the Government is not mandating any particular technological solution for the delivery of Medicare-eligible video consultations, there is a range of material available to guide practitioners on what to consider when setting up and performing video consultations and further work is underway. The links on this page lead to a range of material that can assist practitioners to make decisions about how to approach video consulting.   
  
Although videoconferencing is new to Medicare reimbursement video conferencing is already widely used in health, particularly within State health systems, and there is a wide range of existing technical standards that apply to video conferencing technology.  
  
Through the Government’s consultation with the medical profession and other stakeholders on the development of the telehealth initiative, it is clear that while all medical specialties can potentially conducted consultations via video link, the specific technical requirements vary from specialty to specialty. Different types of specialist consultations can be satisfactorily performed using different types of technology, taking into account the patient’s particular medical condition, local infrastructure and patient/practitioner preferences.  
  
It is certainly not necessary that only high-end or dedicated systems are used for video consultations, and the Government does not want to discourage the adoption of telehealth by imposing unnecessarily stringent and expensive technical requirements. The professional colleges, rather than the Government, are the appropriate bodies to set standards and promote good practice in the area of telehealth as they do for all aspects of medical practice.   
  
The documents below have been provided to assist practitioners in identifying the issues that may need to be considered when establishing telehealth capability**. The documents contain views and opinions provided by a range of organisations which do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government.**

Useful Documents

It is important that individual clinical settings and requirements are taken into account by practitioners considering providing telehealth services. Practitioners may also wish to consult their College or other professional association about these issues.   
  
[Clinical Practice for Telehealth](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/connectinghealthservices-clinicalpract)

Guidance on Technical Issues for Clinicians

The following guidance has been taken from the Telehealth Business Case, Advice and Options Report commissioned by the Department to provide advice on security, privacy, interoperability and technical requirements for a broad range of telehealth services.

UniQuest

The Government engaged UniQuest Pty Ltd to provide expert advice and options regarding a broad range of telehealth implementations. The two Reports produced for this consultancy are provided below.   
  
[Telehealth Business Case Advice and Options in PDF format](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/6E3646F307A5E938CA257CD20004A3A8/$File/UniQuest%20Telehealth%20Business%20Case%20Advice%20and%20Options.pdf)  
[Telehealth Business Case Advice and Options in RTF format](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/6E3646F307A5E938CA257CD20004A3A8/$File/Uniquest%20Telehealth%20Business%20Case,%20Advice%20and%20Options%20Report.rtf)  
  
[Telehealth Assessment Report in PDF format](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/6E3646F307A5E938CA257CD20004A3A8/$File/UniQuest%20Telehealth%20Assessment%20Report%20.pdf)  
[Telehealth Assessment Report in RTF format](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/6E3646F307A5E938CA257CD20004A3A8/$File/Uniquest%20-%20Telehealth%20Assessment%20Report.rtf)  
  
The Telehealth Business Case, Advice and Options Report present the business requirements for the introduction of a broad range of teleconsultations and include technical advice and options for the implementation of video consultations.  
  
The Telehealth Assessment Report is a comprehensive background document regarding a broad range of telehealth implementations, including video conferencing based consultations.  
  
Further information:  
  
[Guidance on Technical Issues for Clinicians](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/connectinghealthservices-guidance)  
[Guidance on Security and Privacy Issues](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/connectinghealthservices-secpriv)

NeHTA Standards

In general, clinicians providing MBS billed telehealth services should be confident that the technical solution they choose is:

* capable of providing sufficient video quality for the clinical service being provided; and
* sufficiently secure to ensure normal privacy requirements for health information are met.

Individual clinicians will also need to be confident that the technology used is able to satisfy the item descriptor and that software and hardware used to deliver a video conference meets the applicable laws for security and privacy.   
  
Outside of the Medicare environment, video conferencing is already widespread and established practice in State public health systems, and there are already a number of guidelines and position statements on the clinical use of telehealth available to doctors. Some of these are referenced on this website and they can all be used to inform practitioners on the questions that should be considered when setting up and undertaking video consultations.