

24 July 2020

Mr Mark Roddam
First Assistant Secretary
Health Systems Policy & Primary Care, Mental Health
Australian Government Department of Health

By email to: Mark.Roddam@health.gov.au

Dear Mr Roddam

Re: Continuation of telehealth during COVID-19 pandemic

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) continues to welcome the Department of Health's ongoing work to support the delivery of psychiatry services by telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed, when I and the President Elect Dr Vinay Lakra met with you on 3 July, the RANZCP's recommendation and request is to continue the existing COVID-19 telehealth items for a further period of at least six months, from 30 September 2020 onwards, to facilitate ongoing access to psychiatry during the pandemic. This approach is now particularly crucial for mental health care and outcomes given the significant and continuing rise in the incidence of COVID-19 infections in Australia. An extension will also allow for proper evaluation of the effectiveness of these measures.

Beyond COVID-19, the RANZCP strongly supports the ongoing use of telehealth in psychiatry as a complement to face-to-face consultations, acknowledging that patients and practitioners will have varying preferences for its use dependent on a range of factors. The RANZCP has recently consulted with members to ascertain how and why telehealth has been used by psychiatrists during the COVID-19 pandemic, including key benefits and barriers. We received over 1,000 responses to this survey, with the vast majority of members valuing that telehealth has allowed them to continue to provide high quality accessible care to their patients. We look forward to sharing the results with the Department of Health, to help inform how telehealth could look in the future.

In addition, the RANZCP wrote to Minister Hunt last week requesting consideration of the urgent implementation of telehealth item numbers for the delivery of psychiatry inpatient services to assist in preventing spread of COVID-19 between staff, patients and the broader community, and to allow for continued patient accessibility to psychiatrists. This issue remains critical and we will follow up with the Minister further to offer every assistance.

We look forward to working with you on these matters. For any queries on the points raised, please contact Rosie Forster, Executive Manager, Practice, Policy and Partnerships Department via rosie.forster@ranzcp.org or by phone on (03) 9601 4943.

Yours sincerely



Associate Professor John Allan
President

Ref: 1848

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