



Preparing your practice to deal with the coronavirus (COVID-19)¹

FOR PRACTITIONERS



With the increasing spread of the coronavirus many members are seeking information to help them navigate working in this changing environment. This information sheet provides an outline of the COVID-19 telehealth items and actions that can be taken to support the ongoing work of psychologists in their practice now and into the future.

With ongoing updates from the Federal Government about the changes we need to make in our personal and professional lives, the APS aims to update this information sheet as new details comes to hand.

COVID-19 telehealth items

The Government has introduced new COVID-19 [Medicare telehealth and telephone items](#). This allows psychologists to videoconference with clients who meet the eligibility criteria. The coronavirus Medicare item numbers (Telehealth: 91166, 91167, 91169, 91170 and telephone: 91181, 91182, 91183, 91184) correspond to the Better Access telehealth items (80001, 80011, 80101, 80111) and hence, the same referral and reporting requirements apply. See page 2 for further details.

Eligible clients are those for whom at least one of the following apply:

- the person has been diagnosed with COVID-19 virus but who is not a patient of a hospital
- the person has been required to isolate themselves in quarantine in accordance with home isolation guidance issued by Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC)
- the person is considered more susceptible to the COVID-19 virus being a person who is:
 - a. at least 70 years old; or
 - b. at least 50 years old and is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; or
 - c. is pregnant; or
 - d. is a parent of a child under 12 months; or
 - e. is already under treatment for chronic health conditions or is immune compromised.
- the person meets the current national triage protocol criteria for suspected COVID-19 infection.

¹ This information sheet is current as of 3pm AEST 16 March 2020.

The services **must be bulk-billed** and we have been advised that you will be able to use your regular Provider Number from an alternative location if necessary.

The new COVID-19 telehealth and telephone item numbers for psychologists are:

Clinical psychologists

91166 Telehealth attendance lasting more than 30 minutes but less than 50 minutes

91167 Telehealth attendance lasting at least 50 minutes

91181 Telephone attendance lasting more than 30 minutes but less than 50 minutes

91182 Telephone attendance lasting at least 50 minutes

Psychologists

91169 Telehealth attendance lasting more than 30 minutes but less than 50 minutes

91170 Telehealth attendance lasting at least 50 minutes

91183 Telephone attendance lasting more than 30 minutes but less than 50 minutes

91184 Telephone attendance lasting at least 50 minutes

Where a psychologist is in isolation for possible COVID-19 virus infection (has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but is not in hospital, or has been required to isolate based on Australian Health Protection Principal Committee advice) they will be able to use the telehealth services to provide ongoing services to their clients.

Actions to take now in your practice

- Contact current clients and staff (via SMS or email) and advise them that they should not attend sessions/work if they are unwell. Refer them to the [Department of Health website](https://www.health.gov.au) so they can stay up-to-date with Government advice.
- Place relevant information on noticeboards in your practice, on your website, and through social media and other communication platforms informing clients to stay up-to-date with Government advice (e.g., staying home if feeling unwell, frequent handwashing and social distancing).
- Ask clients about any anxiety they may be experiencing and provide them with factual information about the




coronavirus in an accessible way along with information on how to manage any anxiety they may be experiencing. The APS has developed an [information sheet](#) for members to provide to clients.

- Ensure you have the necessary technology to provide services through telehealth should then need arise e.g., a computer that allows a visual and reliable internet connection with adequate security and sufficient bandwidth required to send and receive documents and information. The APS document, [Principles for choosing videoconferencing technology](#) is a useful resource. If you are unsure you may need to consult with an IT professional.
- If billing under Medicare for telehealth services is not available to your clients, explore potential options such as providing services for a fee or consider whether you are prepared to provide pro bono services if you believe ongoing services are essential.
- Identify those clients (or staff) that are particularly vulnerable based on the high-risk groups identified by the Government for telehealth services.
- Monitor the APS website and APS emails where regular updates will be provided.
- Make hand sanitiser available in your practice and encourage regular handwashing – not just now but always!

Future planning

- Generate a contact list for all clients, staff, referrers and other relevant people in case you need to close the practice suddenly.
- If you become unwell with coronavirus you should follow medical advice and self-isolate for the appropriate period of time to ensure your recovery and the protection of those around you. According to the current advice from Government psychologists who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 (but are not in hospital), or have been required to isolate based on Australian Health Protection Principal Committee advice, can use the telehealth items with their clients. Any other illness or condition on the part of the psychologist does not meet eligibility criteria to use telehealth.

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