

At-risk cancer patients to continue to access Telehealth phone call rebates Cancer physicians applaud Government's reversal of Telehealth cuts

Canberra: Australian cancer patients will still be able to access vital Medicare rebates for phone calls with their specialists - at least for the next six months - after the Australian Government reversed an unexpected decision to axe the Telehealth item.

The nation's peak body of cancer specialists had been strongly advocating for their patients to continue to access subsidised phone call consultations, especially at a time when the surge in COVID-19 posed a great risk to those Australians with compromised immunity.

The Telehealth reforms were announced eight working days before they were due to start on January 01, 2022. It sparked immediate concerns for the Private Cancer Physicians of Australia (PCPA) who said too many cancer patients – elderly, regional, those without stable internet, with landlines only and those who couldn't manage the technology – simply could not cope without access to subsidised phone consults.

The President of the PCPA, Assoc Professor Christopher Steer, said today's announcement by the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP and the Regional Health Minister, Dr David Gillespie MP, was an immense relief for Australia's cancer patients, their families and their specialists.

"At a time of surging pandemic, we need our immunocompromised vulnerable Australians to stay at home and not be forced to travel into public areas where COVID-19 may be rampant," A/Professor Steer said.

"We are very supportive of Telehealth, particularly during this pandemic and making it permanent was a welcome decision but then the fine print was only revealed days before Christmas."

After successfully and urgently advocating for the Medicare rebate (item number 91835) for phone call consults to be reinstated, A/Professor Steer praised the Government for being flexible and listening to cancer patients, and their specialists, before any unintended consequences were inflicted on such a vulnerable patient cohort.

The PCPA also welcomed the extension of Telehealth rebates for patients, who are in hospital, to receive a phone consultation with their specialist.

A/Professor Steer also applauded patient advocacy groups, such Pink Hope, Rare Cancers of Australia and the Breast Cancer Network of Australia and colleagues from the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) and the Medical Oncology Group of Australia (MOGA) for their collaborative support.

The PCPA will continue to advocate for the reinstatement of the 50% loading (item number 112) for video consultations for regional and rural patients.

"We must always prioritise the wellbeing of our most vulnerable Australians," A/Professor Steer said.

"We will do all we can to work with the Government to reduce the out-of-pocket costs of those already struggling with cancer and ensure any future policy decisions do not add to the financial toxicity of their cancer journey." ENDS

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NB Assoc Professor Steer is a practicing regional-based oncologist and may not be available at all times

About Us

The [Private Cancer Physicians of Australia \(PCPA\)](#) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the improvement of the health system for all cancer patients, but particularly for private cancer patients in Australia. Our mission is to promote and work towards a health system that provides high quality, fair, integrated cancer treatment