



### **Telehealth phone call rebates must be permanently reinstated.**

#### **- A communique -**

Earlier this year, Telehealth (MBS) rebates for phone calls with specialists was extended, by six months, to June 30, 2022.

Without permanent reinstatement, our most vulnerable Australians – those who are elderly, those with cancer and other chronic diseases such as arthritis, and those living in regional and rural areas – will bear the brunt of the axing of vital Medicare rebates for phone calls with their specialists.

As patient advocates, and the Specialists who care for them, we are calling on the new Government to protect these at-risk Australians and permanently reinstate the Telehealth rebate for all phone consults. At the very least, we need 12-18 months of considered consultations to ensure no person is harmed (physically, mentally and/or financially) because they are unable to access video technology or travel to their specialist for a consult.

Removing the phone items for initial and standard consults, will penalise people who have poor internet connections, no access to technology or transport, are disadvantaged and/or are living remotely, and those who are older, disabled, or cognitively impaired.

Specialists, and the people they care for, may prefer to use video technology, or have the consultation in person but too often this is not possible nor safe for the patient. All patients must continue to have a suitable, alternative option available.

As a priority, Australians who are immunocompromised should not be forced to put their health at greater risk by attending medical settings and potentially be exposed to COVID-19 or influenza.

Equally, making patients, and their carers, drive or even fly long distances, stay overnight, away from their homes also places greater financial stress on these patients who are already struggling with out-of-pocket costs.

The ability to deliver remote care allows Specialists, who are unwell themselves with COVID-19 or other respiratory infections, to work from home without endangering their patients and other staff.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the President of Private Cancer Physicians of Australia A/Professor Christopher Steer on +61 2 6198 3279 or the Chair of Rare Cancers Australia, Mr Richard Vines on 02 4862 2768.



Australian Rheumatology Association



Yours sincerely,

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