

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 29 May 2017

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OUTCOME: 4 - Individual Health Benefits

Topic: Telehealth

Type of Question: Hansard Page 80, 29 May 2017

Senator: Griff, Stirling

Question:

Senator GRIFF: I would like a bit of clarification. I understand that for GPs who are focused on psychological strategies their patients are allowed to have 10 visits—I understand that is what is permitted. I would like to know why you do not allow telehealth consultations for patients with GPs in rural and remote locations.

Mr Bowles: I do not know. We might—

Ms Jolly: I can talk a little bit about that. We have telehealth arrangements in the MBS. In this particular instance we would need to get some further information about how it works in relation to that.

Mr Bowles: That said, there was a measure in the budget in relation to telehealth psychology services. I do not know—

Senator GRIFF: But that did not relate to remote and rural locations.

Mr Bowles: No, but it related to psychological services. Let's take that one on notice.

Answer:

In 2011, the Australian Government decided to introduce Telehealth services under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) to address some of the barriers faced by people in remote rural and regional areas in accessing specialist services. Medicare rebates are available for video consultations for both the specialist telehealth service and, if necessary, for a general practitioner or other medical practitioner, midwife, Aboriginal health worker or practice nurse to attend at the 'patient-end' of the videoconference.

Whilst GP consultations are not eligible for telehealth MBS benefits, GPs have access to patient-end support services MBS benefits during the telehealth specialist consultation.

The Australian Government recently announced funding of \$9 million over four years from 2017-18 for Telehealth Access to Psychological Services in rural and regional Australia to enhance ease of access to, and increase choice in, mental health services. From 1 November 2017, eligible patients in rural and regional locations will be able to access Medicare rebatable mental health services through video consultations under the MBS 'Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners' (Better Access) initiative.

The Better Access initiative currently provides rebates for allied health providers to deliver up to ten planned mental health sessions in a calendar year to patients with an assessed mental disorder with are referred by:

- a GP managing the patient under a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan; or
- under a referred psychiatrist assessment and management plan; or
- a psychiatrist or paediatrician.

The announced changes will allow up to seven of ten annual Better Access mental health consultations to be provided through video consultation, with one of the first four sessions required to be delivered through a face-to-face consultation. Relevant services can be delivered by eligible clinical psychologists, registered psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers.