

MEDIA STATEMENT

MBA urged to move beyond telehealth to virtual care

Healthcare today is delivered in a digital world and telehealth needs to be more broadly defined as “virtual care” says the Australasian Institute of Digital Health in a public submission to the Medical Board of Australia (MBA).

In its submission into the MBA’s public consultation process around [revised guidelines for telehealth consultations with patients](#), the Institute recommends the MBA consider replacing the terminology “technology-based consultation” with virtual care, or virtual health rather than telehealth.

Institute CEO Dr Louise Schaper said a revision of the MBA guidelines was a welcome opportunity to take a bigger leap forward and position virtual care more broadly in the community, where it had been well received particularly during the pandemic.

“We’re recommending that in its review of the guidelines, the MBA goes beyond the focus on consultations, which are the only form of healthcare activity in Australia that currently receives financial support under the Medical Benefits Scheme, and start considering virtual care including telehealth as a *fundamental principle*,” she said.

“Other healthcare activities can be provided remotely and very successfully such as obtaining second opinions, shared care, and monitoring of a patient’s health status using technology.

“Virtual care, in many instances and circumstances, can be perfectly capable of providing the high quality level of care and outcomes without the supplemental need of in-person presence.”

In its submission, the Institute says virtual care doesn’t always need an in-person presence and the two do not always need to work in tandem in every situation. There are a number of use-cases where safe care has been delivered entirely remotely for many patients living with disability, and so virtual care medical consultations could provide the same, if not a greater and more comfortable level and quality of care.

The Institute also addressed the matter of secure data sharing, urging the MBA to explicitly state that practitioners should use technology that adheres to health privacy policies and guidelines.

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