



Deeble Issues Brief No 43. Towards a sustainable funding model for telehealth in Australia

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Telehealth services in Australia should be supported and continued beyond the immediacy of the pandemic. The roll-out of the telehealth program during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a public health success, with limited evidence to suggest that telehealth services are harmful to population health and well-being. Nevertheless, its rapid implementation has resulted in a large government spending for new MBS items and ICT infrastructures. Therefore, extending the telehealth program beyond the pandemic will require the consideration of fiscal sustainability on future budgets.

Drawing on government and non-government research this Issues Brief identifies and investigates potential barriers to cost-effectiveness, efficiency and equity in existing telehealth policies.

Recommendations

- Telehealth services in Australia should be supported and continued beyond the immediacy of the pandemic.
- The Australian Government Department of Health should trial payment models that are less reliant on fee-for-services to improve efficiency and contain costs
- To reduce overutilisation of teleservices that provide low value for money, and achieve better health outcomes for patients, Government funding should be directed towards high value telehealth technologies which can be substituted for face-to-face services.
- The quality of telehealth services and performance should be monitored through data linkage and patient reported outcomes measures. An annual MBS telehealth item review should be performed to ensure ongoing suitability.
- To support the development of evidence-based policy and funding models, the telehealth program should be regularly evaluated by the Department of Health.
- The Australian Government should establish national telehealth standards and health workforce training guidelines to promote the use of high value technology and to ensure safe and high-quality delivery of care.