

MEDIA RELEASE

17 January 2022

Government responds to cancer specialists and consumer groups with \$24 million telehealth expansion.

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) welcomes yesterday's announcement (16/01/22) that enables cancer patients to access Medicare rebates for phone calls with their specialists until 30 June 2022.

COSA has been advocating for the reversal of changes to the MBS telehealth arrangements, which were originally announced to come into effect on 1 January 2022, restricting the use of phone consultations for some specialist items in favour of video conferencing.

COSA President and Medical Oncologist, Professor Fran Boyle AM, said in the context of COVID-19 Omicron rates surging, this news will ensure equitable care for all immunocompromised patients, including people with cancer.

“We know that many people with cancer are already vulnerable due to their disease and treatments. Video conferencing was not an option for many, notably older people and others with limited access to technology and reliable internet, especially those living in regional and rural parts of Australia. Some patients may be challenged following instructions in English, and for others discussing culturally sensitive matters presents additional stress.

This announcement enables us to use telehealth – in whatever form cancer patients can access it – to keep them on treatment, and out of high-risk settings.”

COSA recognises that telehealth has been vital to ensuring continuity of care, as well as greater flexibility in healthcare delivery since the start of the pandemic. It's also been fundamental to keeping our vulnerable cancer patients, as well as multidisciplinary cancer health professionals, safe.

In particular, COSA applauds the introduction of temporary specialist telehealth video and phone MBS items for patients in hospital and initial and complex specialist telephone consultation items. We anticipate complex cases would benefit from a video consultation, and phone would be appropriate for short consultations.

We also praise the Government for making these services available nationally, rather than only in “hotspot” areas.

While COSA applauds the Government's announcement, we will continue to advocate for the reinstatement of the 50% loading for video consultations for regional and rural patients.

“As the peak national body representing multidisciplinary cancer health professionals, COSA will always promote equitable care for all people affected by cancer.”

COSA also acknowledges the advocacy efforts of other medical groups such as Medical Oncology Group of Australia and Private Cancer Physicians of Australia, as well as individual cancer specialists and consumers, who collaborated to have these changes reversed.

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About COSA

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) is Australia’s peak multidisciplinary society for health professionals working in cancer research, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. COSA is recognised as an activist organisation whose views are valued in all aspects of cancer care. We are allied with and provide high-level clinical advice to Cancer Council Australia.

For more information about COSA, visit the website www.cosa.org.au

Media inquiries

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