

Information for people seeking virtual care

May 2024

Ahpra and the National Boards have developed the following information to help you access safe virtual care services from registered health practitioners¹ in Australia.

What is virtual care?

Virtual care involves situations where you receive care from a health practitioner without attending a face-to-face consultation. This health service may be provided through video calls, telephone consultations, online messaging, or similar methods to interact with you where you and the practitioner are not in each other's physical presence. Virtual care might be referred to as 'telehealth', 'telemedicine', 'phone consultation', 'online care', 'teletherapy' or similar words.

Virtual care does not replace face-to-face care, it is just one option for your health care.

It may not always be appropriate for your health practitioner to use virtual care. They may need to conduct a physical examination or may recommend a particular treatment or method of care for you that isn't appropriate to be delivered virtually.

You can inform your practitioner of how you would like to access care and any barriers you may face in attending a face-to-face or virtual appointment. You can choose a face-to-face consultation if this is your preference.

All registered health practitioners must follow their Board's Code of Conduct, including when they are delivering virtual care. You should always expect safe and professional care from registered health practitioners, regardless of how a healthcare service is delivered.

Finding the right practitioner

Health practitioners who are registered in Australia hold recognised qualifications and have met the high standards to practise their profession in Australia. We have confirmed their identity and they have satisfied a criminal history check.

You can check if your practitioner is registered and whether there are any current conditions or limitations on their practice by looking them up on the public register.

If your health practitioner is not registered in Australia, you should be aware of risks when considering them for virtual care:

- they have not met Australian [registration standards](#), which means they may not be able to provide the standard of care you expect or need
- you will not be able to claim any rebates from Medicare and will have to pay the full fee
- they will not be able to prescribe medications to you
- if you have a concern about a health practitioner who is located overseas, and who is not registered in Australia, Ahpra and the National Boards may not be able to consider your concern. In some cases, you can raise your concern with the relevant overseas regulatory body for the jurisdiction and profession that the practitioner is registered with. However, the profession may not be regulated in that jurisdiction and there may be no way for you to raise a concern.
- your personal health information may be stored outside of Australia and subject to different privacy legislation and requirements for regulating and storing health records, and
- the practitioner may not have adequate [professional indemnity insurance](#) (PII). PII is important as it can cover claims of injury or damage made against a health practitioner, including covering legal fees and any compensation or damages which might be awarded to the patient. When a health practitioner is not adequately insured with PII, they may be required to cover any costs associated with a claim. This can be a significant financial burden and could have consequences on any compensation awarded to a patient.

Look up a health practitioner
Check that your health practitioner
is registered in Australia on the
public register.

¹ The following people are registered health practitioners: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners, chiropractors, dental practitioners, medical practitioners, medical radiation practitioners, nurses, midwives, occupational therapists, optometrists, osteopaths, paramedics, pharmacists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, and psychologists.



Tips for virtual care

Preparing for a virtual care consultation

1. Check that your health practitioner is registered in Australia by looking them up on the [public register](#).
2. Discuss with your practitioner or health service whether or not virtual care is safe for you.
3. Let your practitioner or health service know if you will require an interpreter or have any accessibility requirements. You may wish to have support persons at the consultation such as family members, friends, other health practitioners or carers.
4. Let your practitioner or health service know if you have any limits to accessing technology which could affect your virtual care appointment.

What you can expect during a virtual care consultation²

5. You can expect your health practitioner to:
 - identify themselves and confirm your identity
 - protect your privacy and your right to confidentiality
 - provide information to you in a way you can easily understand
 - deliver culturally safe healthcare if you're an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
 - seek your **informed consent**, including telling you about the billing arrangements for the consultation and any associated treatment/s
 - ask you about your current condition and relevant past health and medication history
 - support you to attend a face-to-face consultation if a direct physical examination or other face-to-face treatment is necessary to provide good care
 - provide advice to you about a management plan if your symptoms worsen or if you have further questions
 - assess and regularly reassess whether virtual care is safe and clinically appropriate for you and the type of care they are providing
 - make appropriate arrangements to handover your care if necessary and, with your consent, inform other relevant health practitioners of the health care you received via virtual care, and
 - keep clear and accurate health records about your care.

What is informed consent?

Health practitioners must ensure they have your informed consent to any health service including virtual care services.

Informed consent is a person's voluntary decision about healthcare that is made with knowledge and understanding of the benefits and risks involved.

In virtual care you can expect your health practitioner will seek your informed consent particularly about fees, proposed treatment, sharing information with others in your care team and if the consultation will be recorded.



Online prescribing of medicines

Your practitioner may be able to prescribe medication to you during a virtual care consultation. This is generally safest if you have consulted with the practitioner in-person previously and they have sufficient knowledge of your health and medication history.

Other prescribing

Like online prescribing of medication, practitioners may be able to prescribe other treatments, such as orthoses, glasses and other assistive technologies during a virtual care consultation. Again, this is generally safest if you have consulted with the practitioner in-person previously and they have sufficient knowledge of your health and health history.

Be aware that virtual care consultations by email or text message may not be able to provide good care.

² You can learn more about your rights when receiving health care in the [Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights](#)

Helpful resources

Codes of conduct

National Boards' [codes of conduct](#) (or equivalent) explain the standards of conduct you can expect from registered health practitioners, including when attending a virtual care appointment. You can expect practitioners will follow this guidance whether they are providing virtual care services or traditional face-to-face services.

Information for health practitioners who provide virtual care

Information for health practitioners who provide virtual care can be found here.

Additional information

- Your state or territory health department has information and resources about virtual care. [NSW Health](#) has information about virtual care available in various languages.
- The Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre has developed [telehealth information for consumers](#) including checklists to assist you when attending a virtual care appointment.
- The Australian Digital Health Agency provides [telehealth guidance](#) for consumers and the agency's [online portal](#) provides education for both health care providers and members of the public about virtual care.
- The Department of Health's [MBS website](#) has information specific to the ongoing Medicare telehealth arrangements.