

MEDIA RELEASE

Telehealth future in doubt

The future of telehealth remains uncertain, with psychologists and mental health care professionals unable to book appointments for their clients post 31 March.

The Federal Health Minister announced last November that telehealth would become a permanent part of the Medicare system however the **Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi)** says telehealth item numbers are still due to expire on 31 March 2021.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said the uncertainty of this program with its looming end date continued to put a huge strain on the mental health of Australians, which was already suffering as a result of the pandemic.

“In addition, it’s placing added stress on an already overwrought and pressurised workforce of psychologists, and other mental health professionals, who are unable to plan their diaries and reassure their clients of continued telehealth consultations,” she said.

“The government seems unwilling to put in the legislative effort required to make telehealth a truly permanent offering.”

A survey of AAPi members in October 2020 found that 91 percent of psychologists supported telehealth being made permanent.

“Although telehealth became necessary as a result of the pandemic, it has proven to be life changing for many clients,” Ms Carrison said.

“It means that finding an available registered psychologist who meets your needs is no longer limited by location, and those who struggle to see a psychologist in person, such as single mums with young children, are able to more easily access necessary support.

“For people with physical limitations or compromised immune systems, who would have otherwise struggled to see their psychologist in person, telehealth has ensured ongoing treatment and support.

“The Health Minister needs to explain to the Australian people why he continues to place this undue stress on the population and mental health care professionals by refusing to make telehealth permanent.

“Psychologists need to be able to make appointments now for April and beyond, particularly for clients who need a schedule of sessions. And Australians struggling with their mental health need to be reassured that they will be able to access regular sessions with their psychologist, regardless of their location.”

– ENDS –

About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi):

The AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, the AAPi's primary goal is to address inequality in the profession and represent all psychologists and their clients equally to government and funding bodies. Its primary mission is to lobby for equitable access for the Australian public to professional psychological services funded under the current Medicare Better Access Scheme.

About Tegan Carrison, Executive Director, AAPi:

Tegan has spent over 15 years in public health promotion and is passionate about advocating for the rights of health care professionals and improving access for the community. After studying Nutrition and Health Promotion at Deakin University, Tegan went on to become an experienced clinical educator, supervisor, and mentor, including starting a student-led interprofessional clinic with the University of Queensland's not-for-profit UQ Health Care. Tegan also brings a wealth of experience in business management, administration and human resource management. She is passionate and dedicated to improving access to mental health services and creating the leading members association for psychologists in Australia.