

MEDIA RELEASE

Telehealth extension a relief, but not enough

The **Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi)** has welcomed the three-month extension to telehealth but says it needs to be made permanent.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said a short term extension does not give clients or registered psychologists the certainty they need.

“Telehealth has proven to be life-changing for so many people, in particular those with mental health issues.

“To be able to offer it as a permanent service will make a significant difference to the practitioner/client relationship and result in better health outcomes,” she said.

“Last July the Federal Health Minister said he hoped and intended for telehealth to be a positive legacy of the pandemic and that he was ‘already engaged with the medical community in planning a long-term future for telehealth’.

“Three months is certainly not a long-term future. Many clients make appointments eight weeks ahead of time. Our members need assurance that telehealth is here to stay, and we hope the government will now put in the legislative effort required to make telehealth a truly permanent offering.”

Ms Carrison said the government held out until just two weeks before telehealth was due to expire before announcing the extension.

“This caused considerable stress and anxiety for clients and psychologists. We are asking the government to plan for the next phase for telehealth well in advance of the new 30 June 2021 deadline,” she said.

“Telehealth is not only required in response to COVID-19. Telehealth has increased access to psychologists for hundreds of thousands of Australians. It has become a life saving option for many who would struggle to physically see a registered psychologist. We need a responsive healthcare system that can adapt to the changes occurring in our society.

“Telehealth is not an added expense for the government or taxpayers, it is simply a different and flexible delivery method that helps to support the most vulnerable in our community to seek the care they need - when and where they need it.”

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

– 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.