

28 July 2021

Professor Brendan Murphy
Secretary
Department of Health
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601
By email: brendan.murphy@health.gov.au

Dear Professor Murphy

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is disappointed that the Department of Health (Department) has not heeded our advice regarding the compliance letters sent to hundreds of General practitioners (GPs) who were caught out by rules concerning Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) claiming for telehealth consultations.

After a challenging year of COVID outbreaks, GPs feel let down that their best efforts to provide care to all Australians, in a complex and changing pandemic, have not been taken into consideration by the Department.

In addition to confusing and changing rules, we are particularly concerned about GPs that were made to re-pay Medicare funding for providing telehealth services to ongoing patients of their practice, but did not technically meet the rule of existing relationship. While assurances were given by your Department to the RACGP that GPs in this situation would be considered on a case-by-case basis, the feedback from GPs is that this has not been the reality of their experience. These GPs provided services in good faith to long term patients of the practice, with whom they have an ongoing and continuous relationship. The circumstance that the patient had not been seen face-to-face in a 12-month period is irrelevant in a relationship that is based on many years of care.

The intention of the 12-month face-to-face consultation rule was to restrict virtual clinics exploiting the telehealth MBS items, at the expense of long-term patient care, while at the same time supporting GPs to provide care to ongoing patients of the practice. These GPs met the intent of this rule.

The Department's persistence with this officious approach at a time when GPs are being called on to deliver the largest vaccination program ever known in Australia not only lacks common sense, but it has also alienated thousands of GPs who are continuing to work tirelessly for the safety and well-being of all Australians. The impact on the profession as-a-whole will have a lasting effect on patient care as GPs attempt to navigate an increasing and complex compliance burden, while trying to provide the best possible care to patients.



Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

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The RACGP is calling on the Department to commit to meaningful engagement with the RACGP and Australia's GPs, respecting their value and prioritising fairness in future compliance activities so that all Australians can access high quality care.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karen Price
RACGP President