

16 September 2020

The Hon Darren Chester MP  
Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**By email: [Darren.Chester.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Darren.Chester.MP@aph.gov.au)**

Dear Minister Chester

In two weeks, Australians seeking health services under Department of Veterans' Affairs arrangements will have telehealth taken away from them. Since March, Australians have accessed over 150,000 allied health telehealth services under Medicare and DVA to manage or prevent a range of chronic illnesses. Without these telehealth services, Australians would have had to make the choice between risking COVID-19 or jeopardising their long-term health.

An overwhelming majority of Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) working in private practice have highlighted the important role telehealth has in supporting their regular patients. In a recent survey conducted by Dietitians Australia, 97% of private practice APDs found the introduction of telehealth rebates for Medicare, Department of Veterans' Affairs and private health patients due to COVID-19, continues to be integral to the provision of nutrition care.

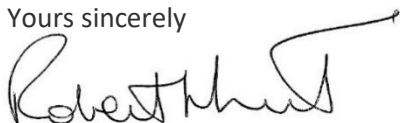
APDs have reported that telehealth has been of benefit to many of their patient groups including:

- Increasing ease of access for those who are unable to or find it difficult to travel (for example, people who do not drive, clients in lockdown, border town residents and carers).
- Reducing the potential health impacts from travelling to an appointment for clients with health conditions such as chronic fatigue, mental health conditions, mobility issues and people who are immune compromised.
- Eliminating travel time for all clients, regardless of location, and travel costs (for example, public transport, fuel/parking, taxi fares) which is particularly beneficial for clients with low income.
- Expanding health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Several private health funds have already extended telehealth access for their customers. To ensure equal access for all Australians, allied health telehealth items must be extended to be a permanent feature of DVA-funded health services. This is the Morrison Government's opportunity to establish a legacy of caring for Australians during and beyond COVID-19.

Dietitians Australia would be glad to discuss the benefits of telehealth services further with your office.

Yours sincerely



Robert Hunt  
Chief Executive Officer