

4 November 2020

The Hon Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**By email: [Minister.Hunt@health.gov.au](mailto:Minister.Hunt@health.gov.au)**

Dear Minister Hunt

Last week I had the pleasure of meeting with your colleague the Honourable Minister Ken Wyatt to discuss the positive impact telehealth has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over the past several months. In this meeting, Minister Wyatt stated strong support for the continuation of telehealth for all Australians and advised me to seek a meeting with you to discuss further.

Telehealth presents many benefits to the provision of healthcare. These are captured in the Dietitians Australia position statement on telehealth and in the results of a recent survey of Dietitians Australia members. An outline of these benefits is in the attached briefing paper for your perusal.

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

Yours sincerely



Robert Hunt  
Chief Executive Officer

# Briefing Paper: Telehealth Dietetics

## Dietitians Australia position

Patients can receive high-quality and effective dietetic services via telehealth. There are numerous benefits to expanded telehealth access under Medicare and private health funds, including:

- Reduced health and service inequalities
- Improved access to effective nutrition services
- Support for people with chronic conditions to optimise their health and well-being, regardless of their location, income or literacy level<sup>1</sup>

## Policy recommendations

1. Funding and Medicare item numbers for telehealth dietetics should be made permanent, beyond 31 March 2021.
2. Remuneration benefits under Medicare and private health funds should be increased for telephone and videoconference-delivered consultations provided by Accredited Practising Dietitians, as these are cost-effective and low cost to operate.
3. Dietetic services delivered via mHealth and eHealth should be considered eligible for Medicare or private health rebates when they are used alongside telephone or video conferencing modalities or in-person delivery.

## Fact: Telehealth increases access to services

Research has shown nutrition services delivered via telehealth are just as effective as traditional face-to-face service delivery, whether it is for weight management, chronic disease management or the treatment of malnutrition.<sup>1</sup>

Effective telehealth delivery methods include consultations by phone and videoconference (eg CoviU, WebEx), supported by email and text messages.<sup>1</sup>

Patients benefiting from greater access to dietetics via telehealth include:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Rural and remote residents
- Parents and carers
- People with health conditions such as chronic fatigue, mental health conditions (eg agoraphobia, anxiety), mobility considerations (eg wheelchair users, chronic pain), NDIS participants and people who are immune compromised
- People in lockdown
- Border town residents
- People experiencing low income
- Fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers

There is currently no evidence indicating that telehealth dietetics is not appropriate for a particular patient group or health condition. However, extra measures must be taken to support patients who are hard of hearing, require language translation, or need assistance using technology.

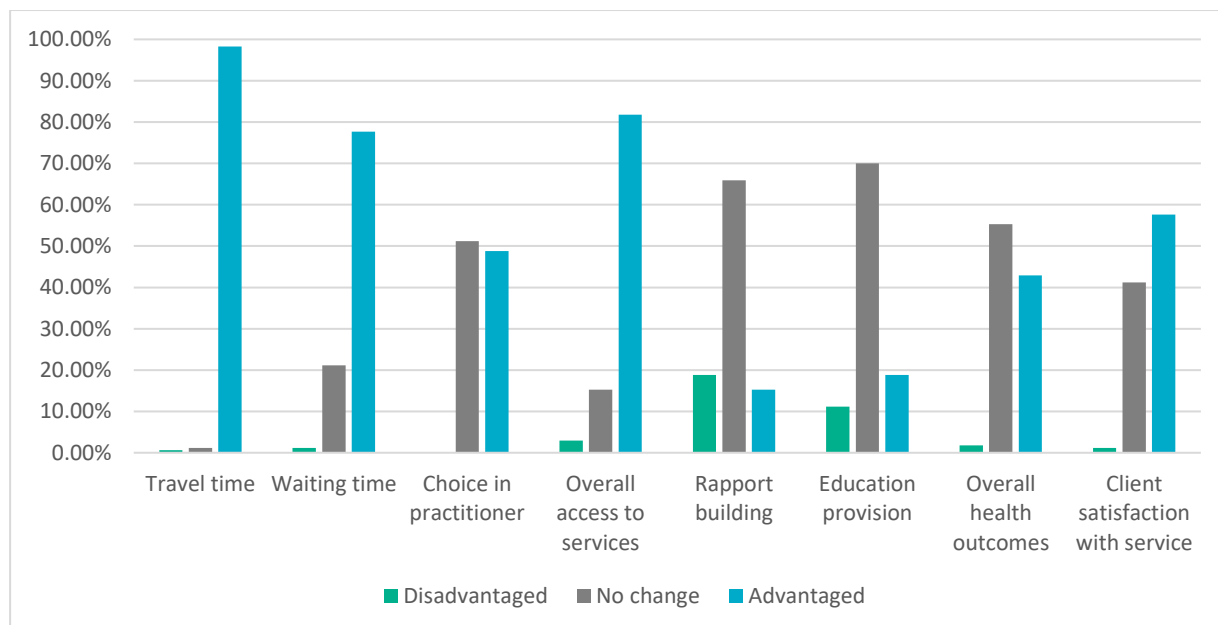
## Fact: Telehealth saves patients time and money

Research has shown that telehealth provides several benefits to patients, including:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Time saved on travel, in waiting rooms, away from work and school
- Less money spent on travel or for time off work
- Ability to show the dietitian their pantry contents or serving sizes, providing the dietitian a level of insight into the patient they might not have obtained under normal circumstances
- Reduced concerns about contracting COVID-19 when seeking healthcare
- Ability to attend appointments if feeling unwell or tasked with caring duties
- Assisting collaborative decision-making where family are located away from each other

Despite concerns telehealth may pose a barrier to establishing rapport, a recent survey of Dietitians Australia members in private practice showed that most respondents reported no change (66%) or an advantage (15%) to rapport-building with clients when using telehealth (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1 Private practice dietitians' perceptions of impact of telehealth on patients**



## References

1. Kelly JT, Allman-Farinelli M, Chen J, et al. Dietitians Australia position statement on telehealth. *Nutrition & Dietetics*. 2020;77(4):406-415. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12619>
2. Dietitians Australia. Member survey: Impact of telehealth on private practice dietetics [Data set]. 2020.