

Mental illness forecasted to be next wave of COVID-19 pandemic.

Sandri Galea, Epidemiologist and Dean of Public Health at Boston University who studied the impacts of the SARS epidemic, has reported that COVID-19 has the potential to have devastating and far-reaching effects on the mental health of the public.

In a recent statement, Lifeline reported that the number of Australians calling Lifeline in distress has risen substantially (from 23% to 39%) in response to COVID-19. This follows a previous increase of almost 15% in calls during the Australian bushfires.

Now, more than ever, do we need to be proactive in our approach to mental health with early detection and education being highlighted as crucial first steps. With item numbers for the development and/or review of a Mental Health Care Plan, Eating Disorder Management Plan, and Chronic Disease Management Plan now available via phone/video conferencing, our trusted General Practitioners have an important role to play in reducing the rates of suicide and mental illness during the pandemic.

The relevant Telehealth item numbers are summarised below.

Service	Existing items (for face to face)	Telehealth items (via videoconference)	Telephone items (via telephone)
Mental Health Services			
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	2700	92112	92124
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	2701	92213	92125
Review of a GP mental health treatment plan or Psychiatrist Assessment and Management Plan	2712	92214	92126
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	2715	92216	92128
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of a GP mental health treatment plan, at least 40 minutes	2717	92217	92129

Eating Disorder Management			
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90250	92146	92154
GP without mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90251	92147	92155
GP with mental health skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, lasting at least 20 minutes, but less than 40 minutes	90252	92148	92156
GP with mental skills training, preparation of an eating disorder treatment and management plan, at least 40 minutes	90253	92149	92157
Review of an eating disorder treatment and management plan	90264	92170	92176
Chronic Disease Management			
Preparation of GP management plan (GPMP)	721	92024	92068
Coordination of Team Care Arrangements (TCAs)	723	92025	92069

While it remains a legislative requirement that telehealth services provided by GPs are bulk billed for Commonwealth concession card holders, children under 16 years old and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19, the good news is that the bulk billing incentive Medicare fees have doubled (until 30 September) and that normal billing can be applied in all other cases.