



FOR SPECIALIST PRACTICES

Telehealth Consultations

The following user guide provides steps on how to conduct a telehealth consultation in your practice, including:

- preparing patients for the consultation,
- preparing yourself for the consultation,
- running the consultation, and
- closing the consultation.

Together, these steps will support you in conducting a range of consultations with patients via video or telephone.



NOTE: This guide assumes telehealth systems have been set up in your practice. The [Telehealth Consultations Implementation Guide](#) provides step-by-step detail to assist in setting up telehealth consultations.

STEP

1

PREPARE PATIENTS

STEP

2

PREPARE FOR THE CONSULTATION

STEP

3

RUN THE CONSULTATION

STEP

4

CLOSE THE TELEHEALTH CONSULTATION

+

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Step 1: Prepare Patients

After successfully implementing telehealth consultations in your practice, the first step of telehealth is to provide patients with information about the remote consultations, including how to prepare for the consultation and gain informed consent.

TELEHEALTH CONSULTATION INFORMATION

Patient information should use plain language and include:

- how the consultation will proceed,
- the length of the consultation,
- the purpose of the telehealth consultations
- the main benefits, limitations and risks of telehealth consultations,
- the main differences between telehealth consultations and alternative options for care,
- the patient's rights and responsibilities, and
- costs to patient.¹

This [Telepractice information sheet](#) from Recovery Station, an allied health practice, provides an example of how information can be provided to patients.

PATIENT ROOM REQUIREMENTS

Before conducting telehealth consultations, specialists should ensure their patients are in suitable room. For telephone consultations, patients should ensure that the room is free of background noise, while video consultations should be treated the same as well as having adequate and direct lighting. To maintain privacy, the specialist may need to advise the patient of the need to conduct the consultation in a private and quiet area without disturbance.

Note: it is important to note that telehealth consultations may increase specialist contact for domestic violence survivors. For guidance on how to inquire about and respond to a disclosure of domestic violence see the following [resource](#) from the Australian Journal of General Practice.²

PATIENT CONSENT

Specialists should be satisfied that patients have consented to participate in the telehealth consultations, and the consent should be documented. In cases where the patient is not capable or does not have the capacity to give consent, consent should be sought in the **same way** as for a face-to-face consultation.³ Principles of consent include:

- the patient needs to be given the information,
- the patient needs to understand the information,
- the patient needs to make a choice, and
- the consent must be informed, relevant, free and voluntarily in nature.

Consent should cover possible risks, possible benefits, safeguards, and alternatives.

For practices opting to gain informed consent with a consent form, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) provides an example patient consent form on page 60 of the [Telehealth online education module](#).

Step 2: Prepare for the consultation⁴

ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS⁵

Video consultations may be conducted in a standard consulting room, or can be set up in a separate space, such as the treatment room. Importantly, video and/or telephone consultations should be hosted in a space that will support the practice's clinical workflow and in an environment that supports the quality of telehealth interactions. To optimise the "visual experience" for your patient the room should be:

- well-lit (avoid large differences in brightness such as sitting in front a window with open blinds), and
- have a neutral background (e.g. free of background stripes and cluttered space).

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

To conduct a video consultation, ensure that you have a webcam, microphone, speakers (or headphones), ideally two screens (one for telehealth software, one for medical records) and a quality internet connection. For telephone, ensure you have an operating phone line that is connected and functional. Further information on hardware and software requirements is included in the [Telehealth Consultations Implementation Guide](#).

Consider the equipment and logistics required at the patient's location. For example, if telehealth consultations are being used to remotely care for an elderly patient, they may require telehealth equipment and assistance provided by carers (family, or aged care facility staff) to connect successfully with the specialist. In addition, consider the chosen telehealth software and the subsequent requirements for patients to participate in a remote consultation.

HAVE A 'PLAN B'

Ensure you have the patient's phone number and a plan B in place such as rescheduling or using the phone if technological issues arise or there are other complications.

ACCESS TO PATIENT INFORMATION

Know how you will access the patient's notes before, during, and after the session, and ensure that there is read/write access to the practice's clinical information system during the session. This will support the natural flow of the telehealth consultation and will support safe storage of information collected during the interaction.

ENSURE TELEHEALTH CONSULTATIONS ARE CLINICALLY APPROPRIATE FOR THE PATIENT'S NEEDS

Check a telehealth consultation is clinically appropriate for each patient. Patient suitability will vary based on factors including the type of consultation (e.g. initial appointment, post-operative check-ins), case mix (consultative versus procedural), and individual needs (e.g. capacity to travel and participate in Telehealth, plus family, work and cultural situation). Your practice may have guidance on patient suitability, otherwise, you may need to develop this (see Step 1, [Telehealth Consultations Implementation Guide](#), for further information on Telehealth appropriateness).

Without due consideration of the condition, technology, and personnel available, it is NOT recommended to use telehealth consultations with potentially serious, high-risk conditions requiring physical examination, when internal examination is required, when patients are not comfortable using telehealth consultations, and when the patient's ability to communicate is compromised. In a pandemic situation, telehealth consultations may provide a useful triaging option for high risk scenarios, but it must not be imposed in a manner that compromises clinical care.

However, when considering the above, telehealth consultations CAN be used for any scenario where a telephone or video consultation protects vulnerable populations, and any consultation where the trade-off between attending face-to-face and staying at home favours the latter.



Step 3: Run the consultation

A telehealth consultation is no different from any other medical consultation and should be conducted in a similar manner to a face-to-face consultation. A telehealth consultation of high quality is one in which recommendations for assessment, clarification of diagnosis, and recommendations for treatment and review are clearly communicated as per current best practice models of care. For the first interaction, the specialist and patient should introduce themselves, with the specialist providing some background information, including their credentials and experience.⁶

BEGINNING OF THE CONSULTATION

- initiate consultation by connecting online or calling the patient,
- check that sound and video is working,
- revert to plan B if technology is not working,
- confirm identity of patient (name and date of birth),
- take and record verbal consent, and
- explain what can and cannot be done during Telehealth consults.

DURING THE CONSULTATION

Telehealth consultation etiquette⁷

It is very important to ensure good etiquette and ensure that:

- everyone at each location knows who is at the other end (introductions),
- the specialist is facing the video camera and/or is using eye contact, assuming this is culturally appropriate for the patient (for video consultations),
- specialists pause after speaking and are conscious about allowing the patient to speak,
- specialists pay attention to their own voice and tone, as well as the patient's (especially for telephone sessions), and
- the session concludes with all parties clearly understanding the outcome and any next steps.

Documentation⁸

A note should be made in the patient's files that the consultation was conducted remotely through a telehealth consultation. In addition to usual documentation requirements, documentation for each consultation might include:

- mode of service delivery (e.g. video/telephone),
- sites that were linked (if relevant),
- attendees at the session,
- any technical difficulties that occurred that impacted on the clinician's ability to discharge their duty of care, and
- responsibilities for each element of the patient's management.

Note: technical difficulties do not provide an excuse, medico-legally, for failure to discharge a duty of care.

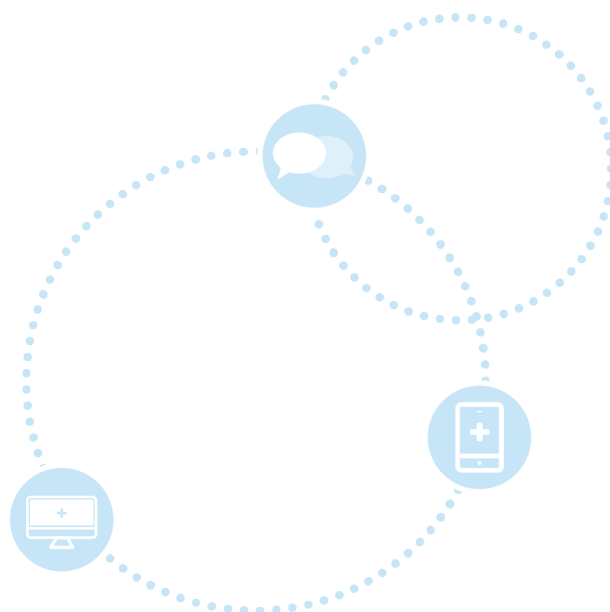
Recording video consultations⁹

The default position is that telehealth consultations are not recorded. However, instances may arise where it is clinically appropriate to record all or some of a telehealth video consultation. When doing so, it is important that:

- patients are provided with information about how the recordings (including discrete still images) would be managed, stored and accessed,
- patients are given an option for the session not to be recorded and not to proceed with the consultation,
- consent is gained in advance of the session from the patient and documented in the patient's health record,
- patient consent is recorded verbally on camera at the commencement of the consultation, and
- recordings are securely stored in the patient's health record.

Note: patients may opt to record the session, with or without informing the specialist. In this regard, telehealth consultations are no different to to-face consultations.

For more information, see the [Clinical images and the use of personal mobile devices](#) guide for collecting, using, disclosing and storing clinical images (including video and audio recordings) developed by the Australian Medical Association and the Medical Indemnity Industry of Australia.



Step 4: Close the telehealth consultation

CLOSE THE CONSULTATION

A telehealth consultation should be closed in the same way as a face-to-face consultation by summarising key points from the interaction and what will happen next. Ask the patient if they need anything clarified and explain how the patient will receive their scripts if relevant. Confirm and record verbally or in writing if the patient is happy to use telehealth consultations again. Ask the patient if they will complete an evaluation form. Tell the patient that you are going to close the call. Afterwards, send an evaluation form to the patient.

EVALUATE THE CONSULTATION

Patient¹⁰

After their first experience of a telehealth consultation, the patient should be asked for an evaluation of the experience. If the patient participates in remote consultations over an extended period, this evaluation should be repeated at regular intervals or if warranted by a change in the patient's condition. Since video consultations are new to most clinicians and patients, it may be of benefit to ask patients to fill out a structured feedback form online. This will provide information for the practice to review the use of telehealth consultations and guide future decisions and will inform risk management.

An example patient evaluation form can be found on pages 63 and 64 of ACRRM's [Telehealth online education module](#).

UNDERTAKE FOLLOW-UPS

Conduct any necessary follow-ups, such as requests and prescriptions that you were not able to action during the consultation. Depending on your practice management software, you may be able to send electronic prescriptions to the patient. If you do not yet have Electronic Prescription capability, consider sending a copy of the prescription to the patient/pharmacy of their choice.

A new system for Electronic Prescriptions is being rolled out nationally. The Electronic Prescriptions system offers benefits for patients and practices including security and convenience. To learn more, read the Australian Digital Health Agency's guide to [Electronic Prescriptions – For Prescribers](#), and access the Specialist Toolkit [Electronic Prescribing module](#).

UPDATE PATIENT INFORMATION

Ensure the patient's health record is up to date with consultation notes and actions from the telephone or video-based consultation (as you would normally), including that it was conducted via telephone/video consultation.

RECORD ANY DIFFICULTIES

Ensure that you have recorded on the patient's file any technical difficulties/malfunctions that may have occurred during the telehealth consultation, including when they occurred, the type of malfunction (e.g. audio, video, sound), and any impact this may have had on the level of provided care. Report this to the designated person, if applicable, or the practice manager if in doubt.

Additional telehealth consultation resources

- [Telehealth Video Consultations Guide](#) | RACGP¹¹
- [Handbook for the Telehealth online education module](#) | ACRRM
- [Factsheet – How to do a high-quality remote consultation](#) | ACRRM
- [Help Centre](#) | Australian Digital Health Agency

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¹ Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), '[Handbook for the TeleHealth online education module](#)', n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

² Neil, J., (2020) 'Domestic violence and COVID-19: Our hidden epidemic', Australian Journal of General Practice, 49: 25. doi: 10.31128/AJGP-COVID-25. [ePub ahead of print]. Available at www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/coronavirus/domestic-violence-and-covid-19

³ RACP, '[Telehealth Guidelines and Practical Tips](#)' n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁴ RACP, '[Telehealth Guidelines and Practical Tips](#)' n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁵ Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), '[Handbook for the TeleHealth online education module](#)', n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁶ RACP, '[Telehealth Guidelines and Practical Tips](#)' n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁷ ACRRM, '[Handbook for the TeleHealth online education module](#)', n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁸ ACRRM, '[Handbook for the TeleHealth online education module](#)', n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

⁹ RACGP, '[Guide to providing telephone and video consultations in general practice](#)', East Melbourne, Vic, Accessed 10 September 2020.

¹⁰ ACRRM, '[Handbook for the TeleHealth online education module](#)', n.d., accessed 10 September 2020.

¹¹ RACGP, '[Telehealth video consultations guide](#)', East Melbourne, Vic, 2019, accessed 10 September 2020.