

COVID-19 National Health Plan: A Summary for GPs

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11.18am

Our **GP Clinical Advisor, Dr Michael Crampton** has reviewed the recently announced **COVID-19 National Health Plan**, and provides the following **summary for local GPs**.

For full details in relation to each component of the National Health Plan, we encourage you to read the relevant Fact Sheet (links are provided below).

The COVID-19 National Health Plan was announced by Federal Government on 11/3/2020:

"A collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry outlining a range of funding measures the Australian Government is taking to combat coronavirus (COVID-19)"

Comprises:

- [Primary Care – Bulk Billed MBS Telehealth Services](#)
- [Primary Health - MBS Pathology \(Microbiology\) Test for COVID-19 and Influenza](#)
- [Aged Care - Pathology Testing in Aged Care for COVID-19 and Influenza](#)
- [Primary Care – Central Patient COVID-19 Triage Hotline –1800 020 080](#)
- [Health Protection – COVID-19 National Communication Campaign](#)
- [Primary Care – Fast Track Electronic Prescribing](#)
- [Primary Care – Home Medicines Services to support the response to COVID-19](#)
- [Primary Care – Respiratory Clinics](#)
- [Primary Care – Boosting Workforce and Infection Control Training for current staff](#)
- [National Medical Stockpile – Purchase of Masks, Other Personal Protective Equipment and Pharmaceuticals](#)
- [Aged Care – Aged Care Preparedness](#)

More information will be made available over the next days to weeks.

Currently available details of these initiatives are listed by the proposed time until available:

By Friday 13/03/2020 (but appears delayed)

Primary Care – Bulk Billed MBS Telehealth Services

- To any person isolating at home on advice of medical practitioner (in accordance with AHPPC guidance), or any person confirmed as meeting national triage protocol for suspected COVID-19 infection
 - Service can be provided by any practitioner
 - Service must relate to COVID-19
- To persons in vulnerable groups (>70yo, ATSI >50yo, chronic health condition, immunocompromised, parents of new babies, pregnant women)
 - Service provided by practitioner who has seen patient for at least 1 FTF consult in previous 12 months
 - Service can relate to any healthcare matter
- Service to be by video consultation
- Service MUST be bulk-billed

To be implemented "soon" - no timeframe identified

Primary Health - MBS Pathology (Microbiology) Test for COVID-19 and Influenza

- Intended to be ordered by medical practitioner for symptomatic patient (no other details available yet of any other criteria)
- MUST be bulk-billed by pathology provider
- No details of which private pathology providers or collection centres, or when the MBS item will be available, have been specified
- FOR SAMPLES COLLECTED BY A GP OR GP STAFF MEMBER, FULL PPE **MUST** BE USED

Aged Care - Pathology Testing in Aged Care for COVID-19 and Influenza

- In-reach service to collect and test samples for persons living in RACFs

Primary Care – Central Patient COVID-19 Triage Hotline –1800 020 080

- The national 24/7 hotline will be expanded to help triage people with respiratory symptoms and those who are concerned about contact with a possible COVID-19 case
- Depending on their circumstances, people will be advised to attend a public hospital respiratory clinic, a primary care respiratory clinic, to self isolate at home, to seek a medical practitioner telehealth consultation or to take no further action.
- The hotline will also provide facilities to support telehealth consultations – where providers or patients may not have access to the appropriate ICT – and maintain a comprehensive national directory of available health services.

Health Protection – COVID-19 National Communication Campaign

- A national communication campaign – across all media platforms, from now through to the end of the year, and translated into more than 20 languages – will inform people about travel, work and health, including taking up health advice and being reassured about the health system's capacity to manage the response to COVID-19.
- The campaign will keep the health and aged care industry informed, including providing up-to-date clinical guidance, triaging and caring for patients, and advice to workers about looking after their own safety. The campaign will also promote the triage line, the dedicated respiratory clinics and telehealth options.

To be implemented "Over the next eight weeks"

Primary Care – Fast Track Electronic Prescribing

- ePrescribing and dispensing implementation will be fast tracked for up to 80 per cent of general practices and community pharmacies over the next eight weeks
- This measure will allow a doctor to prepare an electronic prescription that the patient will then be able to electronically share with their pharmacy, where the pharmacy is able to support the home delivery of medicines.
- This will allow people in self-isolation access to their medicines and will lessen the risk of infection being spread in general practice waiting rooms and at community pharmacies

Primary Care – Home Medicines Services to support the response to COVID-19

- Available to "Vulnerable people" (see MBS Telehealth service item for definition) and people in self isolation will be able to order their Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) prescriptions remotely and have their medicines home delivered to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19.
- This is an optional, demand-driven service, temporarily available for six months.
- All community pharmacies will be eligible to participate if they can support online dispensing of medicine and provide home delivery services.

Primary Care – Respiratory Clinics

- To be established in dedicated premises which meet clear criteria, with arrangements to safely manage infection control.
- They will complement efforts of state and territory clinics at public hospitals.
- The clinics will be staffed by existing general practice doctors and nurses and will be funded to assess, test and diagnose respiratory cases, including COVID-19, influenza and pneumonia
- Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will work with the AMA and the RACGP to identify practices capable of managing the appropriate infection control arrangements, and willing to operate the clinics in a mix of urban, regional and rural settings.
- **Flexible funding will be available to support the setup of dedicated clinics or hybrid clinics:**
 - Dedicated respiratory clinics, which will receive setup funding of up to \$150,000; and

- Smaller clinics may be established as part of continuing practices through mechanisms such as dedicated entrance or wings, isolation controls, and other innovative models subject to verification of safety and standards.

No timeframe specified

Primary Care – Boosting Workforce and Infection Control Training for current staff

- Health workforce will be boosted by health professionals not fully utilised, including doctors who only work after hours, students working restricted hours and other registered health professionals currently not practicing.
- Training will include four key elements:
 - Training delivered to the primary care respiratory clinics, focusing on infection control procedures, fitting protective personal equipment (PPE), and cleaning rooms and equipment.
 - Video-based online training developed for GPs, practice nurses and allied health workers
 - Training for nurses, other aged care workers, cleaners, catering and front-office staff working in residential aged care facilities
 - Training for in-home aged care workers, disability, childcare and other care workers, and home medication delivery workers

National Medical Stockpile – Purchase of Masks, Other Personal Protective Equipment and Pharmaceuticals

- To increase Australia's supply of personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, aprons, protective eyewear) and pharmaceuticals held in the National Medical Stockpile.

Aged Care – Aged Care Preparedness

- A temporary workforce will be made available in case of a staff shortage in a facility due the impacts of the virus, enabling facilities to maintain care for senior Australians.
- A support team, skilled in managing urgent health issues, will be deployed as needed to assist those experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak.
- Aged care providers will be able to access additional workers over and above ordinary workforce costs, in case of an infection.
- Infection control training and education will be provided to aged care staff with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to expand oversight of providers with a focus on infection control.