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## **The Complete Guide to Your Telehealth Appointment in Australia: Everything You Need to Know**

Let’s be honest: nobody wakes up excited to sit in a waiting room, patiently flicking through old magazines while listening to a symphony of coughs. That's precisely why **telehealth appointments have completely changed the game** for how Australians access medical care.

Picture yourself, whether you’re dealing with a persistent cough, chasing a repeat prescription, or simply wanting to chat with a doctor about a health concern – all without needing to leave your couch. Telehealth makes this possible, bringing unparalleled convenience right to your fingertips. Say goodbye to frustrating traffic, germ-laden waiting rooms, and the frantic juggling act of childcare just to squeeze in a five-minute consult with your GP.

But for those new to this digital frontier, a few questions naturally arise: How does telehealth actually work in practice? What should you truly expect during a virtual appointment? And, crucially, how can you ensure your online consultation runs as smoothly as possible, maximizing its value?

This guide is designed to be your complete, no-nonsense roadmap to confidently navigating telehealth in Australia, empowering you to embrace this modern approach to your health.

### **Why Telehealth Has Taken Off in Australia**

Australia is, famously, a vast continent. For countless individuals, particularly those living in rural or regional areas, "seeing a doctor" traditionally meant dedicating a significant chunk of their day – sometimes a half-day trip into town, or even longer for those in truly remote locations.

Telehealth hasn't just bridged these geographical gaps; it’s delivered a raft of other powerful benefits that have propelled it into the mainstream of Australian healthcare.

#### **Convenience Like Never Before**

Imagine the sheer simplicity of ducking into a GP appointment on your lunch break without even needing to step outside your office building. Or, picture having a detailed conversation with a specialist while comfortably seated in your own kitchen. Telehealth makes these scenarios a tangible reality, reshaping how we interact with healthcare providers.

For many Aussies, this unparalleled convenience often spells the difference between getting prompt medical help and simply putting it off because the traditional process feels too cumbersome or overwhelming. It removes those everyday friction points that often deter people from seeking timely care.

#### **Better Access, Wherever You Live**

Perhaps telehealth’s most profound impact has been as a lifeline for people residing in rural and regional communities. The days of enduring hours on the highway for a quick ten-minute consult are, for many, a rapidly fading memory. Instead, telehealth ensures you get access to quality healthcare exactly where you are, making specialized care accessible in ways previously unimaginable.

Beyond geography, its accessibility extends to:

* **People with mobility challenges:** Those for whom physical travel to a clinic poses significant difficulty find telehealth invaluable.
* **Parents juggling kids:** Managing appointments around school runs, naps, and meal times becomes far more manageable.
* **Individuals with busy or irregular schedules:** People working shift hours, odd rosters, or FIFO (Fly-In, Fly-Out) often find it easier to slot in a virtual appointment.
* **Those who simply prefer privacy:** For some, the discreet nature of an online consultation, avoiding a public waiting room, offers a greater sense of comfort and reduces anxiety.

#### **Safer Care**

The COVID-19 pandemic undeniably accelerated telehealth's adoption. It served as a critical tool for keeping both patients and healthcare professionals safe when face-to-face appointments posed inherent risks. Even now, with the pandemic largely behind us, telehealth remains an exceptionally handy option, particularly during peak flu seasons or for anyone who is immunocompromised and needs to minimize exposure to common illnesses. It's a proactive measure for public health.

#### **Supporting Mental Health**

For the realm of mental health, telehealth has been nothing short of a game-changer. The virtual format often removes several significant barriers to care:

* **Comfort and Openness:** Some individuals find it considerably easier to open up and discuss sensitive mental health concerns from the familiar, secure, and private environment of their own home.
* **Discretion:** The discreet nature of virtual consults means no awkward moments in public waiting rooms, which can be a relief for those concerned about privacy or perceived stigma.
* **Expanded Choice:** You're no longer limited to the pool of local providers in your immediate vicinity. Telehealth allows you to connect with a broader range of psychologists or psychiatrists located anywhere across the country, increasing your chances of finding the right fit for your needs.

#### **Potential Cost Savings**

While it's important to remember that telehealth isn't always free (just like in-person visits), it often delivers financial savings in less obvious ways. Consider the money saved on petrol, the elimination of parking fees, and potentially fewer hours taken off work. Moreover, the good news is that Medicare now covers a broad range of telehealth services, making quality online healthcare even more accessible and affordable for many Australians.

### **How to Book Your Telehealth Appointment**

Booking a telehealth appointment in Australia isn’t overly complicated, but the landscape of your options has certainly expanded, offering greater flexibility. Let’s walk through how to get started.

#### **Start With Your Regular Doctor**

If you already have a usual GP or specialist, beginning your telehealth journey with them is often the simplest and most recommended approach. These days, a significant number of general practices and specialist clinics have integrated telehealth into their service offerings for their existing patients. It's usually the easiest route because your doctor already possesses your comprehensive medical history and understands your ongoing health needs, ensuring strong continuity of care.

To find out if your regular clinic offers telehealth, you can:

* **Check their website:** Many clinics prominently display their telehealth options online.
* **Simply give them a ring:** Ask their reception staff if they offer telehealth, whether it’s primarily via phone or video, and what the associated cost will be – importantly, clarify if it can be bulk billed for your circumstances.

#### **Dedicated Telehealth Platforms**

Perhaps you don't have a regular GP, or you find yourself needing an appointment quickly – possibly even outside standard clinic hours. This is precisely where dedicated online telehealth services truly shine. These platforms specialise in connecting you with available Australian-registered doctors efficiently.

Some trusted Australian providers include:

* **Instant Consult**
* **TeleDoc Australia**
* **Phenix Health**
* **24-7 MedCare**
* **Medicly**

These services are specifically designed to offer:

* **Short wait times,** often providing same-day appointments.
* Access to **GPs or specialists** available via video or phone.
* Online doctor consultations for a wide range of **common issues.**
* The convenience of **prescriptions and e-scripts.**
* Issuance of **medical certificates.**
* And crucial **specialist referrals.**

The booking process is generally very straightforward, allowing you to book directly on their websites or through dedicated apps, often in just a few clicks.

#### **Healthdirect — The Government’s Tool**

Another incredibly handy and reliable option is the Healthdirect website. This invaluable resource, managed by the Australian Government, is designed to help you:

* **Find nearby clinics or services** anywhere in Australia.
* **Filter specifically for telehealth providers**, ensuring you're only seeing relevant options.
* **Locate specialised services** like urgent after-hours GP care or dedicated mental health support services.

#### **What You’ll Need When Booking**

Regardless of the platform or clinic you choose, most telehealth booking processes will typically ask you for:

* **Your full name, date of birth, and contact details.**
* **Your Medicare card details** (if you plan to claim a rebate).
* **A concise reason for your appointment** – just a few words to give the doctor an initial understanding.
* **Your preferred appointment times** or an indication of your availability.

It’s always a smart move to **confirm the fees and Medicare rebate eligibility upfront** during the booking process. This simple step can prevent any unwelcome surprises when the invoice eventually comes through.

### **How to Prepare for Your Telehealth Appointment**

Here's where investing a little bit of prep work truly pays off. Think of it like getting ready for a traditional face-to-face doctor’s visit – but with significantly fewer old magazines and definitely no fish tank bubbling sadly in the corner. Proper preparation can make all the difference to a smooth and effective virtual consult.

#### **Test Your Tech**

The beauty of telehealth lies in its simplicity, but that simplicity relies on your technology cooperating. Before your appointment, it’s wise to perform a quick tech check:

* **Your Device:** Ensure you’re using a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer that has a working camera and microphone. Most modern devices come with these built-in.
* **Internet Connection:** For video calls, a stable and reliable internet connection is crucial. If your connection is patchy, consider moving closer to your Wi-Fi router or using mobile data (4G/5G) if you have good signal strength.
* **Pre-Call Check:** Take a moment to test your camera, microphone, and speakers before the call. Many clinics will even send you a test link beforehand so you can ensure everything works perfectly.
* **Optimise Performance:** Close down any other applications or browser tabs that might be consuming significant internet bandwidth, as this can lead to freezing screens or choppy audio. If other people in your household are streaming movies or engaged in online gaming, politely ask them to pause their activities while you're on your call to free up bandwidth.

#### **Find a Quiet, Private Spot**

For telehealth to be truly effective, you need to be able to speak freely and openly without interruption or concern for privacy.

* **Choose a quiet, private room** where you won't be disturbed and where others cannot easily overhear your conversation.
* **Sit somewhere well-lit.** Natural light is always best – try to sit facing a window or lamp so your face is clearly visible to the doctor, rather than having a bright light source directly behind you, which can cast your face in shadow.
* **Optimal Camera Angle:** If it’s a video call, try to position your device so the camera is roughly at eye level. This creates a more natural and engaging conversational angle.
* **Support Person:** If you’d like a family member, friend, or support person to join you during the consultation, it's always a good idea to let your clinic know in advance. Ensure they are also visible on screen if it's a video call.

#### **Have Your Details Ready**

Just as you would for an in-person visit, having key information readily accessible can streamline your telehealth appointment considerably:

* **Your Identification:** Keep your Medicare card handy, along with any private health insurance information if relevant.
* **Medication & Allergies:** Prepare a comprehensive list of all your current medications (including over-the-counter drugs and supplements) and their dosages. Crucially, list any known allergies you have.
* **Symptom Notes:** Jot down clear, concise notes on your symptoms. Think about:
  + When did they start?
  + How severe are they?
  + Are they getting better, worse, or staying the same?
  + What seems to make them better or worse?
* **Your Questions:** It’s incredibly easy to forget your questions once you’re in the middle of a consult, so jot them down beforehand. This ensures you cover all your concerns.
* **Home Medical Devices:** If you regularly use any home medical monitoring devices – such as a thermometer, a blood pressure cuff, or a blood glucose meter – keep them nearby. Your doctor might ask you for recent readings or even to take a reading during the call.

### **What Happens During Your Telehealth Appointment**

So, what’s it actually like to “see” your doctor online? For the most part, it’s remarkably similar to an in-person consult – just minus the paper gowns, the cold stethoscope on your chest, and the sometimes-awkward silences in the waiting room.

Here’s a step-by-step breakdown of what you can expect.

#### **Starting the Call**

At your scheduled appointment time, the process typically begins in one of two ways:

* You might receive a **phone call directly from the doctor** or the clinic.
* Alternatively, you’ll receive a **secure video link** via email or text message. Simply click this link, and you’ll be connected directly to your virtual consultation room.

#### **The Identity Check**

Before diving into your health concerns, your doctor will perform a brief but important identity check:

* They will **introduce themselves** and confirm their credentials, often stating their name and where they're calling from (e.g., "Hi, I'm Dr. Smith from Medicly").
* They will then **ask for your name, date of birth, and sometimes your address or Medicare number** to verify your identity. This vital step is all about keeping your information secure and ensuring they’re speaking to the correct patient, maintaining your privacy and safety.

#### **Talking Through Your Concerns**

This is the very heart of your appointment – the clinical conversation. Your doctor will:

* **Ask detailed questions about your symptoms,** encouraging you to describe them clearly.
* **Check on your relevant medical history,** including any past conditions, surgeries, or ongoing treatments.
* **Discuss lifestyle factors** that might be pertinent to your health.

If it’s a video call, the interaction can be even more dynamic:

* Your doctor might **visually examine** things like a skin rash, areas of swelling, or visible injuries. They may ask you to move your camera closer or adjust your lighting to get a better view.
* They might **guide you to perform simple movements** for a basic physical assessment, such as moving a limb to demonstrate range of motion, gently pressing on a sore spot (if safe to do so), or showing a specific area of your body.

Don’t worry if this feels a little strange or unfamiliar at first. Most telehealth doctors are highly skilled at guiding patients through virtual examinations and making the process feel as comfortable and natural as possible.

#### **Discussing Next Steps**

After assessing your symptoms and medical history, your doctor will talk you through their findings and discuss the path forward. This will typically involve:

* **Possible diagnoses:** They’ll explain what they believe might be causing your symptoms.
* **Treatment options:** They’ll outline the recommended course of action, which could include medication, self-care strategies, or lifestyle changes.
* **Further investigations:** They’ll advise whether any additional tests or specialist referrals are needed to either confirm a diagnosis or guide further treatment.

Specifically, your doctor might:

* **Write you an e-script for medication:** This is a digital prescription token sent directly to your phone via SMS or email.
* **Arrange blood tests or imaging scans:** They can issue electronic or paper referrals for these.
* **Issue a medical certificate:** This can often be emailed to you as a PDF for work or school absences.
* **Set up a follow-up appointment:** This could be another telehealth consult or an in-person visit if a physical examination is required.

And here’s a golden rule: **always ask questions.** If you’re unsure about anything the doctor says, whether it’s a diagnosis, a treatment plan, or how to take a medication, now is absolutely the time to clarify. Your understanding is key to successful treatment.

### **What Telehealth Doctors Can Do For You**

It's a common and valid question: What exactly can a telehealth doctor handle effectively? The answer, as you'll see, is quite a lot, covering a broad spectrum of common medical needs.

#### **Prescriptions**

Need medication? Telehealth doctors are fully equipped to manage your prescription needs:

* They can **issue electronic prescriptions (e-scripts)**, which are incredibly convenient. These are sent directly to your mobile phone via SMS or email, containing a digital token you simply show to your pharmacist. This streamlines the process, often getting your medication into your hands faster.
* If preferred or necessary, they can still **send traditional paper scripts** directly to your nominated pharmacy.

It's important to note that certain **controlled medications** (such as strong pain relievers or sedatives) might still require an in-person visit for safety and regulatory reasons, given their higher risk of misuse or dependence. Your doctor will advise you on this.

#### **Referrals**

Telehealth doctors are fully authorised to issue essential referrals:

* They can provide electronic or paper referrals for **blood tests** or other **pathology investigations** (like urine or stool samples).
* They can also arrange referrals for **scans** such as ultrasounds, MRIs, or X-rays, guiding you to the appropriate imaging centres.
* Crucially, they can issue **specialist consultations**, referring you to a cardiologist, dermatologist, endocrinologist, or any other specialist required for your care.

Many modern telehealth services are seamlessly integrated with major pathology or imaging providers, allowing for direct and efficient transmission of your referrals.

#### **Medical Certificates**

For those times when you need official documentation for absence or fitness for duty:

* Telehealth doctors can readily provide **medical certificates for work or school absences.**
* They can also conduct **fitness-to-work assessments** for certain roles.

These certificates can often be emailed to you instantly as a secure PDF document.

#### **Chronic Disease Management**

If you live with ongoing conditions like diabetes, asthma, hypertension, or heart disease, telehealth doctors are invaluable for consistent management:

* They can **adjust existing management plans** based on your symptoms and home readings.
* They provide vital **medication reviews**, ensuring your prescriptions are still optimal and checking for side effects.
* They offer ongoing **lifestyle and self-care guidance**, empowering you to actively manage your health.

This continuity of care via telehealth helps keep you on track with your health goals without the constant need for in-person trips to the clinic.

#### **Mental Health Care**

Telehealth has proven to be an exceptionally powerful tool for supporting mental health. Doctors can:

* **Discuss mental health symptoms** in a confidential and comfortable environment.
* **Create or review mental health treatment plans**, guiding you towards appropriate support.
* **Refer you to psychologists, psychiatrists, or counsellors**, connecting you with a broader network of professionals.
* For certain conditions, GPs may also **provide counselling sessions themselves**, offering ongoing support.

### **After Your Telehealth Appointment**

Your virtual appointment might end, but your healthcare journey certainly continues. There are usually a few important steps to take afterwards to ensure seamless continuity of care.

#### **Prescriptions**

If your doctor issued an e-script for medication:

* You’ll typically **receive a digital token** (a barcode or QR code) via SMS or email immediately after your consultation.
* Simply **show this token to your pharmacist** at any Australian pharmacy to collect your medication.
* Don’t panic if you accidentally delete or lose your token; your doctor or pharmacist can usually **resend it** to you.

#### **Referrals**

If you’ve been referred for tests or a specialist consultation:

* Make sure to **book these appointments promptly** to avoid delays in your care.
* **Keep electronic or paper copies** of your referrals handy, as you'll need these when you attend your appointment. Many electronic referrals integrate directly with the pathology or imaging provider, but it’s always good to have your own copy.

#### **Follow-Up Care**

Your doctor will usually advise you on the next steps for your ongoing care:

* They may **recommend another telehealth appointment** to review test results, check on your progress, or adjust treatment.
* Alternatively, they might **suggest an in-person follow-up** if a physical examination becomes necessary for further assessment or treatment.
* You might also be asked to **monitor your symptoms** at home or take regular readings (like blood pressure or blood glucose) and track them for discussion at a later consult.

Crucially, everything discussed and decided during your telehealth appointment goes directly into your medical file. This ensures that there’s complete continuity of care for any future appointments, whether they are virtual or face-to-face, providing a holistic and up-to-date record of your health.

### **How Much Does Telehealth Cost in Australia?**

Understanding the financial aspects of telehealth is key to accessing it without stress. The cost can vary depending on who you see (GP vs. specialist), the type of service you receive, and how long your consult lasts.

#### **Private Fees**

For standard GP telehealth consultations that are privately billed, fees generally range from **$45 to $75**. Specialist consultations will typically cost more, with fees varying widely based on the specialty and complexity of the service.

#### **Bulk Billing**

The good news is that some GPs do bulk bill telehealth consults, meaning Medicare covers the entire cost and you'll have no out-of-pocket fees. Bulk billing is particularly common for:

* **Concession card holders** (e.g., Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card).
* **Children under 12 months** of age.
* Specific **mental health services** under a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan.

Whether a practice bulk bills is ultimately up to their discretion, so it's always worth asking when you book.

#### **Medicare Rebates**

Telehealth is now a permanent and integral part of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), meaning most services are eligible for a Medicare rebate. This rebate partially covers the cost of your consultation, reducing your out-of-pocket expense.

However, a key point to remember for many general practice telehealth services is Medicare's **"existing clinical relationship" requirement.** This generally means that for your telehealth consult to be eligible for a Medicare rebate, you must have seen the specific doctor or another doctor at that same practice in person within the past 12 months.

There are, however, important exceptions to this rule to ensure essential care is accessible:

* **Babies under 12 months old.**
* **People experiencing homelessness.**
* Those needing **urgent after-hours care** where their regular clinic is closed.
* Patients living in a **declared natural disaster zone.**

It’s always a good idea to **check your eligibility for Medicare rebates when booking** your appointment, as policies can sometimes vary between practices and based on the specific service.

### **Keeping Your Telehealth Appointment Private and Secure**

Your privacy and the security of your sensitive health information are paramount in the world of telehealth. Australian law ensures that telehealth services must protect your data with the same rigour as in-person clinics.

Key regulations that govern this include:

* The **Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)**, which outlines how personal information, including health data, must be handled.
* The **Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)**, which detail how organisations collect, use, store, and disclose your personal information.

Trusted telehealth providers adhere strictly to these laws by:

* Utilising **encrypted platforms** for all communications, ensuring your conversations and data transmissions are secure from unauthorized access.
* **Verifying your identity** at the beginning of each consult to ensure they are speaking to the correct patient and your information remains confidential.
* Maintaining your **records securely stored**, often on Australian servers, with strict access controls.
* Always **obtaining your explicit consent** before recording any calls (though this is rare for standard GP consultations).

#### **Your Role in Maintaining Privacy**

While providers have robust systems, you also play a part in safeguarding your data:

* **Avoid public Wi-Fi:** For sensitive telehealth appointments, always opt for a secure, private Wi-Fi connection at home or a strong mobile data connection. Public networks are inherently less secure.
* **Click wisely:** Only click on links or download attachments from known, trusted telehealth providers. Be wary of unsolicited messages.
* **Review privacy policies:** Take a few moments to review the privacy policy on any telehealth service you use to understand how your data is handled.
* **Verify suspicious contacts:** If you receive an email or message claiming to be your telehealth provider and something feels off or too good to be true, call your clinic directly using a known number (not one from the suspicious message) to verify its legitimacy.

### **The Future of Telehealth in Australia**

Telehealth is far more than just a pandemic invention. It has firmly established itself as a fundamental component of the "new normal" in healthcare, and its evolution is set to continue at a rapid pace.

#### **Hybrid Care Models**

Many forward-thinking medical practices are increasingly embracing what’s known as **hybrid care models.** This approach strategically mixes telehealth and traditional face-to-face appointments, allowing for truly tailored patient care. Doctors can decide when a physical exam is necessary, while still leveraging the convenience of virtual consults for routine check-ins, medication reviews, and mental health support. This blend offers the best of both worlds, optimising patient convenience and clinical effectiveness.

#### **Remote Patient Monitoring**

The integration of **wearable technology and home medical devices** is poised to take telehealth even further. Imagine a future (which is already partly here!) where:

* Your smartwatch can silently monitor your heart rate and alert your doctor to irregular rhythms.
* Home blood pressure readings or glucose levels from your personal monitor are instantly shared with your GP's software.

This continuous, real-time data flow means doctors can offer more proactive, preventative care, potentially leading to fewer unplanned hospital visits and significantly better long-term health outcomes for individuals managing chronic conditions.

#### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Artificial Intelligence is steadily being integrated into various aspects of healthcare, with telehealth being a key area. AI is already being used to:

* **Help triage symptoms,** guiding patients to the most appropriate level of care based on their reported symptoms.
* **Generate clinical notes** for doctors, freeing up valuable time for patient interaction.
* **Support mental health apps** by offering guided exercises or initial support.

Crucially, all these AI applications are developing under strict ethical oversight to ensure patient care remains safe, accurate, and human-centred. While AI can certainly assist, it will always remain a sophisticated tool, not a replacement, for the professional judgment and empathetic connection that defines a live conversation with an AHPRA-registered clinician.

#### **Deeper Integration with My Health Record**

Telehealth will continue to tie in more tightly with Australia's **My Health Record** system. This deeper integration will make it even easier for GPs, specialists, and hospitals to securely and seamlessly share your comprehensive medical information. This translates to better-coordinated care, reduced duplication of tests, and a more holistic understanding of your health journey, regardless of which part of the health system you’re engaging with.

### **The Bottom Line**

Telehealth has, without a doubt, cemented itself as an indispensable part of how Australians look after their health. It’s flexible, remarkably effective, and – let’s face it – often a profound relief when life is already busy enough.

By understanding how to prepare for your virtual consult, what to expect during the appointment, and how to choose reputable services that prioritise your privacy and care, you are perfectly positioned to make telehealth work efficiently and effectively for you.

Thinking about trying telehealth for your next appointment? At Medicly, we're all about making healthcare simple, secure, and personal. Why not skip the waiting room altogether? Book your telehealth appointment today with Medicly, and take that easy step towards getting on with feeling your absolute best.