

30th July 2020

Attention
Mr Hisham El-Ansary
Chief Executive Officer
Bupa
Via email

Re: Telehealth item numbers for Podiatry Services discontinued after 1st October 2020

I write to convey the Australian Podiatry Association's (The Association) disappointment in Bupa's decision to cease telehealth services for podiatry beyond 30 September 2020.

As per Bupa's media release dated 30th July – Bupa announces telehealth is here to stay, that is frustratingly not the case for podiatry and I would question why every other Allied Health service that gained access to telehealth is able to continue exclude podiatry.

With the continuing uncertainty, surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing recommendations likely to be in place for some time, it is the Association's assessment that Bupa's decision to cease supporting telehealth services for podiatry has been made prematurely.

Ensuring the continuity of care for vulnerable and insecure individuals during a time of social isolation is imperative to ensure those at risk of deteriorating health conditions, and those with chronic health conditions continue to receive the treatment they require. Telehealth clearly provides the opportunity to acquire such treatment that might otherwise present a risk in person.

Podiatrists play an important role in maintaining the health and well-being of their patients and it is the Australian Podiatry Associations firm position that many of these services can be conducted in a telehealth setting.

The Association was delighted with the foresight of Bupa's introduction of telehealth item numbers for Podiatry for Bupa customers from 27th April following very positive negotiation with Bupa.

Through these positive engagements with Bupa team members there was strong suggestion that the opportunity for the Association to submit further evidence for the use of telehealth in Podiatry would be afforded prior to Bupa making decisions on the future of telehealth beyond the September 30 deadline. We are disappointed that this opportunity for submission might be overlooked and now fruitless given the apparent decision.

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Since the introduction of temporary telehealth item numbers the Association has engaged university partners in an endeavour to provide evidence on the uptake and effectiveness of podiatry via telehealth for both clinicians and patients. Further to this the Association has developed telehealth podiatry consultation guidelines and produced a series of educative presentations to assist members in the proper use of telehealth in a podiatry setting this information can be viewed on our website here: <https://www.podiatry.org.au/about/news/telehealth-for-podiatrists>

Whilst we understand that uptake of claiming for podiatry telehealth services has been modestly adopted by Bupa customers to date, this sadly overlooks the prospects and benefits it may present to Bupa customers and their podiatrists in the future. This is obviously new territory for many Podiatrists and may be slow to be adopted more broadly. However, the Australian Podiatry Association believes there is great opportunity in the longer term for podiatrists providing consultations by telehealth in a range of settings as outlined in the Association's original submission to Bupa – see attached

In considering the above, I again note the Association's concern surrounding the Bupa decision prior to the Association being in a position to provide further evidence of the effectiveness of the medium.

I therefore request that Bupa re-consider or place on hold any decision relating to the discontinuation of telehealth services for podiatry post 30 September 2020 and provide an opportunity to submit evidence beyond claims data relating to this important decision.

We look forward to continuing constructive discussions with Bupa on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Nello Marino
CEO
Australian Podiatry Association

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