5 May 2020

Dear Professor Kidd,

The Public Health Association of Australia requests your consideration of reducing the risk of coronavirus entering highly vulnerable communities through the support of dental telehealth consultations.

The importance of telehealth during the time of the pandemic has been recognised by the development of telehealth Medicare Benefit Scheme (MBS) item numbers which will be in place until September 2020. Telehealth MBS item numbers have been provided to:

- general medical practitioners, psychiatrists and paediatricians;
- nurses and midwives; and
- psychologists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, dieticians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners.

We request that this support be urgently expanded to include dental professionals as dental diseases:

- are the most common diseases in Australia;
- can progress to severe pain and life threatening systemic infection; and
- are the third most common cause of Potentially Preventable Hospitalisations in Australia.

The conduct of dental telehealth consultations has been facilitated by recent advances in telehealth technology including the use of the intra-oral camera (IOC) by community health personnel in remote clinics. An IOC is a small pen-shaped camera with a camera lens and light at its tip which is connected by wifi or usb to existing telehealth technology or a computer. The camera is operated by a community primary health care provider with the real time guidance of the consulting dentist to illuminate, magnify, photograph and video the mouth of the patient.

The camera transmits the live video and/or photographs to the computer screens of the primary health provider and the dentist supporting the joint oral health care of the patient in their community. This is particularly important for those communities which are highly vulnerable to the coronavirus pandemic and effectively locked down under recently introduced biosecurity laws.

We acknowledge the contribution of Dr David Walker BDS, MHPEd, PhD to this correspondence and highlight the need to support the introduction of MBS dental telehealth consultation item numbers during the coronavirus pandemic.

Yours Sincerely,

Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Tan Nguyen
PHAA Convenor
Oral Health Special Interest Group