



Additional 10 MBS mental health sessions during COVID-19 under the Better Access Pandemic Support measure

Last updated: 9 October 2020

- From 9 October 2020 until 30 June 2022, 10 additional individual psychological therapy sessions, previously available only to people whose movement was restricted by a state or territory public health order, are now available each calendar year to all eligible patients under the existing *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS* (Better Access) initiative.

What are the changes?

The change will expand availability of these additional sessions nationally to eligible people whose mental health has been adversely impacted by COVID-19. Since 7 August 2020, people who were subject to public health orders (PHO) limiting their movement within a state or territory, were eligible for the additional Better Access services if they had:

- an approved Mental Health Treatment Plan;
- accessed all of their initial 10 services; and
- been reviewed by a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician who considered additional mental health treatment services were appropriate.

From 9 October 2020, the requirement for people to be subject to self-isolation, quarantine or a PHO restricting movement within a state or territory in order to access the additional sessions has been removed.

The change will also extend the timeframe for which additional sessions are available. Service availability is as follows:

- Additional Better Access services performed in person will now be available until 30 June 2022;
- Additional Better Access services performed by telehealth or phone will be available until 31 March 2021, as recommended by the Australian Health Protection Principle Committee.



Are the MBS items changing?

Existing items created for mental health services provided under the *Better Access Pandemic Support* measure will continue to be used as mental health treatment items for eligible people. The services are:

- 12 face-to-face, telehealth and phone items for focussed psychological strategy treatment services performed by GPs and other medical practitioners working in general practice (Group A41);
- 6 face-to-face, telehealth and phone items for psychological therapy treatment services performed by clinical psychologists (Group M25);
- 18 face-to-face, telehealth and phone items for focussed psychological strategy treatment services performed by psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers (Group M26).

Medicare rebates are available for up to 10 additional individual mental health sessions. This quota may be claimed in each calendar year from 9 October 2020 to 30 June 2022, with a maximum of 20 individual Better Access sessions available each year.

If previously eligible patients (those subject to state or territory public health orders) received a referral for their additional 10 sessions between 7 August 2020 and 9 October 2020, they can continue to access any remaining sessions under that referral up to a maximum of 10 additional mental health sessions.

Why are the changes being made?

The Government understands that many people with a mental health condition will require additional mental health support at this difficult time. The new mental health services are designed to provide assistance to people who are experiencing severe or enduring mental health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is eligible for these services?

To be eligible, a patient must have:

- an approved treatment plan (either a Mental Health Treatment Plan, shared care plan, psychiatrist assessment and management plan or approved written record) developed by their medical practitioner (GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician);
- used their initial 10 individual Better Access sessions before they seek a referral for additional sessions; and
- a referral from their reviewing practitioner (a referral is not required when the GP developing a Mental Health Treatment Plan also delivers the psychological therapy sessions).

What rules apply to use of telehealth and phone services?

There is no change to the rules that apply to telehealth items for Modified Monash Model areas 4-7.



Use of these telehealth and phone items must comply with current rules for COVID-19 temporary MBS telehealth items. For example, GPs and other medical practitioners working in general practice can only perform a COVID-19 telehealth or phone service where they have an existing relationship with the patient, with limited exceptions. Additional detail is provided in the '[GPs and Other Medical Practitioners' factsheet](#), and '[Provider' FAQ](#).

Videoconference services are the preferred approach for substituting a face-to-face consultation. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providers are able to offer audio-only services via telephone if video is not available. There are separate items available for the audio-only services. Further information about COVID-19 Temporary MBS Telehealth Services can be found on the [MBS Online](#) website.

No specific equipment is required to provide Medicare-compliant telehealth services. Practitioners must ensure that their chosen telecommunications solution meets their clinical requirements and satisfies privacy laws. To assist providers with their privacy obligations, a privacy checklist for telehealth services has been made available on [MBS Online](#). Further information can be found on the [Australian Cyber Security Centre website](#).

Do GPs need to bulk bill certain patients for the additional FPS items?

No. There is no requirement for GPs and other medical practitioners in general practice to bulk bill Commonwealth concession card holders, children under 16 years of age, and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19. It is at the discretion of the doctor to determine the appropriate billing arrangement.

Can referrals made between 7 August 2020 and 9 October 2020 still be used under these changes?

Yes, a patient can continue to use additional sessions under a referral issued between 7 August 2020 and 9 October 2020.

Can a referral for additional Better Access sessions be used across multiple calendar years?

To ensure the greatest flexibility for patients and practitioners, and consistency with the existing referral process for Better Access services, referrals for additional Better Access sessions can be used across more than one calendar year, as long as no more than 20 sessions are accessed in any 1 calendar year.

If a patient is referred for an additional number of Better Access sessions (up to a maximum of 10) and they do not use all of the services stated on the referral by the end of the calendar year, they can continue to use the referral to access remaining services in the next calendar year. Any services accessed in the following calendar year will count towards the maximum of 20 sessions in that calendar year.

Once the patient has used all the sessions stated on their referral, you are required to refer in accordance with the current Better Access initiative. For example, if a patient is referred for 10 additional sessions in



2020 and only uses 6 sessions before 31 December 2020, they can continue to use this referral to access 4 sessions in 2021. Once they have used all the additional sessions stated on the referral, any further services will need to comply with existing processes under Better Access e.g. a patient can only be referred for a maximum of 6 services, until they have completed all 10 initial Better Access sessions.

Do I need to use item 2712 as the review item in making a referral for the additional sessions?

Eligible patients need to see their GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician (the reviewing practitioner) for a review and referral to access the additional 10 sessions performed by allied health professionals. The reviewing practitioner is not required to claim a 'Review' Medicare item (Item 2712). A review can occur using one of the consultation items if a patient has already had a review in the last 3 months.

A referral is not required when the GP who developed the Mental Health Treatment Plan delivers the psychological therapy sessions.

Can providers claim bulk billing rebates through Services Australia?

Registered practitioners providing treatment services for the additional Better Access items can claim bulk-billed services for eligible patients using the item numbers 10990 and 10991 through online claiming with Services Australia, as per existing arrangements.

From 9 October 2020, all claims that meet the eligibility criteria will be paid through Services Australia.

What does this mean for providers?

Medical and allied health practitioners will be able to provide additional support for their patients who will clinically benefit from additional sessions.

How will these changes affect patients?

Eligible patients will benefit through receiving additional mental health treatment and support at a time of increased emotional and mental stress.

Who was consulted on the changes?

Due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, it was not reasonably practicable to undertake normal consultations with stakeholders prior to the creation of these MBS items. The Government has been receiving information and advice from stakeholders on the mental health impact of patients as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, which has informed both the existing Better Access Pandemic Support Measure as well as the expansion of the measure from 9 October 2020.



How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The Department of Health will monitor the use of the new MBS mental health items by eligible providers and the number of sessions used by patients. Use of the items that do not seem to be in accordance with the relevant Medicare guidelines and legislation will be actioned appropriately.

Where can I find more information?

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at www.mbsonline.gov.au. You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

The Department of Health provides an email advice service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules, the *Health Insurance Act 1973* and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, you should email askMBS@health.gov.au.

In addition, you can subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Services Australia website to receive regular news highlights.

If you are seeking advice in relation to Medicare billing, claiming, payments, or obtaining a provider number, please go to the Health Professionals page on the Services Australia website or contact the Services Australia on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

A list of the new items are on the following pages.

Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.

This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.



Type	ItemNum	Category	Group	SubGroup	Description
GP (F2F)	93300	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
GP (telehealth)	93301	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
GP (phone)	93302	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
GP (F2F)	93303	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
GP (telehealth)	93304	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
GP (phone)	93305	1	A41	1	GP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, GP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
OMP (F2F)	93306	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
OMP (telehealth)	93307	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
OMP (phone)	93308	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 30 to 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
OMP (F2F)	93309	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services



OMP (telehealth)	93310	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
OMP (phone)	93311	1	A41	2	OMP, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 40 minutes, OMP registered with CEM, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (F2F)	93330	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, 30 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (telehealth)	93331	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, 30 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (phone)	93332	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, 30 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (F2F)	93333	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (telehealth)	93334	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Clinical psychologist (phone)	93335	8	M25		Clinical psychologist, psychological therapy health service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Psychologist (F2F)	93350	8	M26	1	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Psychologist (telehealth)	93351	8	M26	1	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services



Psychologist (phone)	93352	8	M26	1	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Psychologist (F2F)	93353	8	M26	2	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Psychologist (telehealth)	93354	8	M26	2	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Psychologist (phone)	93355	8	M26	2	Psychologist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (F2F)	93356	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (telehealth)	93357	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (phone)	93358	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (F2F)	93359	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (telehealth)	93360	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Occupational therapist (phone)	93361	8	M26	3	Occupational therapist, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Social worker (F2F)	93362	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services



Social worker (telehealth)	93363	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Social worker (phone)	93364	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, 20 to 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Social worker (F2F)	93365	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Social worker (telehealth)	93366	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services
Social worker (phone)	93367	8	M26	4	Social worker, focussed psychological strategies treatment service, at least 50 minutes, patient to access 10+ Better Access services