

FAMILY PLANNING NSW

2021-2022 BUDGET RESPONSE



TELEHEALTH IS COMING BACK

Family Planning NSW has welcomed last night's budget announcement re-instating telehealth access for patients seeking telehealth appointments for pregnancy counselling and reproductive and sexual healthcare.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic Family Planning NSW added a telehealth service to complement clinic appointments. Telehealth ensured continuity of care and equitable access to reproductive and sexual health services for all people during the 2020 NSW lockdown. The addition of telehealth was a huge success with healthcare access to more than 1500 clients in 1900 consultations.

Changes to the Medicare eligibility of telehealth services in July 2020 excluded patients who had not visited a regular doctor in the past 12 months from accessing telehealth services. Since then, Family Planning NSW has continually advocated to health colleagues and government about the need to reintroduce Medicare rebates for telehealth patients seeking specialised reproductive and sexual health care.

Family Planning NSW CEO Adj. Prof Ann Brassil said the telehealth restrictions meant many patients could no longer access care this way, despite it being a vital strategy to promote equitable access to reproductive and sexual healthcare. The organisation knew it was essential to reinstate access to telehealth services to improve health outcomes, particularly for women, address areas of unmet need, and provide access to healthcare including contraception, STI screening and pregnancy counselling.

The announcement in the 2021/22 Federal Budget extends access to telehealth for all patients seeking reproductive and sexual healthcare or pregnancy counselling. This reinstatement of service ensures equity of access to high quality, essential care for more Australians.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH STRATEGY 2020–2030

The Government has announced funding to address core issues affecting women and girls. The [National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030](#) strategy has 5 priority areas:

- maternal, sexual and reproductive health
- healthy ageing

- chronic conditions and preventive health
- mental health and;
- health impacts of violence against women and girls.

The Government has also announced funding for new initiatives. These include maternal health initiatives, reforms to Medicare items, new Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme listings and reforms to aged care.

Significant funding supporting Australia's commitment to reproductive and sexual healthcare includes;

- \$100.4 million for improvements to cervical and breast cancer screening programs
- \$21.6 million for women's health initiatives
- \$19.3 million for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme listing from 1 June 2021 of Oriprio® (progesterone) to prevent women going into premature labour
- \$22 million for gynaecology items on the MBS, which includes items for Assisted Reproductive Technology and long-acting reversible contraceptives.
- The Government is also addressing gynaecology services funded by Medicare to improve access and safety associated with IUD insertions and diagnostic hysteroscopy, providing \$22.0 million. The reform means women are likely to face lower out of pocket costs for gynaecology items listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule.
- \$32.8 million to fund cervical screening services for Victorian residents
- Promoting access to existing culturally safe family violence services, developing the capacity of services and providing culturally sensitive training on respectful relationships
- \$711.7 million invested for new and amended listings on the MBS including
 - \$22 million for gynaecological procedures, including long-term reversible contraceptives and assisted reproductive technology.

"The care we provide is essential and it is very welcome to have telehealth reinstated as a care choice for our patients."

– Adj. Prof Ann Brassil, CEO Family Planning NSW

CLOSING THE GAP / EQUITY OF ACCESS

In the Budget the government noted significant improvements in health have not been experienced equally by all Australian women. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have higher rates of co-morbid conditions, including diabetes, breast, cervical and ovarian cancers than non-Indigenous women. These areas are noted as a continuing area of focus for the Government beyond the 2021-22 Budget.

For detailed information on the 2021-22 Budget, see the following links:

- Women's Budget Statement
– <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/womens-statement/index.htm>
- Budget Overview
– https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/download/glossy_overview.pdf
- Official Budget Papers
– <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/documents.htm>