

Media Release

12 May, 2021



Telehealth access for pregnancy and reproductive healthcare

Family Planning NSW has welcomed last night's budget announcement extending telehealth access for patients seeking telehealth appointments for pregnancy counselling and sexual and reproductive 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 treatment for all people during the 2020 NSW lockdown. The addition of telehealth was a huge success with telehealth delivering healthcare to more than 1500 clients in 1900 consultations during lockdown.

Accessing contraception was the number one reason people used the telehealth service; gynaecological problems and STI help were other top reasons why people used our telehealth service. However, changes to the Medicare rebate in July last year meant most clients were no longer eligible for telehealth, as they needed to have seen one of our doctors in the past year to qualify.

Family Planning NSW CEO Adj. Prof Ann Brassil said Family Planning NSW had advocated to health colleagues and government about the need to reintroduce telehealth rebates for patients seeking specialised reproductive and sexual health care.

"The changes to telehealth meant many of our patients could no longer access care this way. We knew it was vital to have access to telehealth reinstated for people who wanted to access essential care such as contraception, STI checks or pregnancy care," Adj. Prof Brassil said.

"Many people, especially those from high needs populations who we often work with, simply don't have a relationship with a regular doctor so they just didn't qualify for care through telehealth anymore.

"The announcement in the 2021/22 Federal Budget extending access to telehealth for all patients seeking reproductive and sexual healthcare or pregnancy counselling is welcome and ensures there is equity of access to high quality, essential care for more Australians.

"Seeing patients in our clinics is always our first preference, but we know there can be barriers to patients accessing this style of care, including geographic distance or even pandemic lockdowns. The care we provide is essential and it is very welcome to have telehealth reinstated as a care choice for our patients."

The support of the Commonwealth, State Government and professional bodies including RANZCOG were crucial in securing this extension of services.

– ends –

Media enquiries:

P: 0402 880 653

E: media@fpnsw.org.au

W: <https://www.fpnsw.org.au/>