



Mental Health Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

Call to Mind is a telemental health practice providing bulk-billed and low cost psychiatry and psychology services via telehealth to people in rural and remote areas of Australia. Since our launch in June 2018, we have seen over 1,000 patients from around Australia, people who would have otherwise faced geographical, financial and social barriers to accessing specialist mental health care.

During the process of establishing and developing our service, we have gained several insights that we believe would be informative to the Productivity Commission as they examine the role of mental health in economic participation.

Telehealth is an efficient way to provide healthcare to people in rural areas.

Telepsychiatry has been shown to be a clinically effective form of mental health care, and whilst it does not replace face-to-face care for all people, in many situations it is as reliable and effective as standard consultations. For people in rural areas there are numerous barriers to accessing mental health care, including the long distances they are required to travel, the long wait times for access to local clinicians and the prohibitive expense of some private local clinicians.

The use of telehealth removes the need for long-distance travel, and allows people seeing a specialist to have less time away from their occupational or caring duties. As the barriers to accessing specialist care through telehealth are lower, we anticipate that this encourages earlier presentation and intervention, subsequently reducing illness duration and severity. This would reduce the amount of time off work related to mental health concerns in rural areas and promote functional recovery.



Although we have mostly seen people in rural and remote areas, we receive many requests from people in non-telehealth eligible areas for appointments. In many outer metropolitan areas, such as the western suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, the barriers to accessing mental health care are similarly high. We believe telehealth could be an important part in addressing these difficulties and recommend the removal of the geographical restrictions on the Medicare telehealth codes.

Telehealth allows for more efficient use of the current medical workforce.

Since starting Call to Mind, we have received a lot of interest from psychiatrists and psychologists who are eager to work, but find the standard pathways of public mental health services or individual private work to be inflexible and limited. Many of our psychiatrists are either young parents on leave or returning to work or part-time employees in public services looking for additional clinical time. Without the option of working through telehealth, the skills of these clinicians would not be utilised. We believe that ongoing development of telehealth funding will allow for a more effective use of the resources we currently have available in the medical workforce.

Summary and recommendations

- We suggest that improving the funding for telehealth, particularly for ongoing care, will allow for reduced mental illness burden and impact of treatment in rural areas.
- The geographical restrictions on Medicare telehealth codes do not reflect the barriers to mental health care in metropolitan areas, and we recommend they be reviewed.
- Development of the use of telehealth allows for the more efficient use of our medical workforce, and we would like to see this encouraged and promoted.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Dave Carmody
Founder, Call to Mind